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ITALIENSK RESA

WAHLSTRÖM & WIDSTRAND

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The Alps were behind me - Switzerland with its impersonal, placid, and sad flatness, the tourist brochure of Como with its empty promises on the retouched cover - the whole thing was behind me in the gray-blue evening. I cycled on the main road to Milan. Scooters and monstrous lorries came roaring by, nearly knocking me into the ditch, and a few kilometres beyond Como I'd had enough. I drove onto the first exit on the left which in due course would lead me straight over Bergamo and Brescia and Mantua to Ravenna and the Adriatic Sea. It wasn't the big cities of Italy I wanted to see most.

The air was a shimmering blue and scorching, it seemed to be full of metal shavings. The mountains and the sun disappeared in an ominous haze. After a while I came to some shabby houses. A group of people were hanging out outside a cafe. I asked if there was a hotel in the village and the men exchanged meaningful glances. "No, there was no hotel." A couple of young men joined the group, and their lively chatter resulted in a piece of advice. "Follow that guy!" A little boy in sackcloth swung himself onto a bike and rode ahead of me down a dusty back street between dilapidated shacks to a house that was as dilapidated as the others.

A woman in a worn and washed-out dress stood in the doorway. "Yes, there is a room, but it's not pretty - non e bella," she said with a tired smile. We walked up a musty stone staircase. A lively, unartistic boy with curly hair followed us at our heels. He was wearing shorts. The little guy had disappeared.

The room was certainly not "beautiful". The carpenter responsible for it had apparently only been an apprentice, and had lost his nerve

and disappeared before the job was finished. He had not bothered to use a square. The rough-hewn wood was unpainted, the window was sagging on a single hinge... Still, I liked the room. I didn't know why. Maybe it wasn't the room as such at all, but the worn-out woman with the kind eyes who looked at me so apologetically, almost pleadingly, and the boy in the drafty doorway behind her.

"Bene - I'll take it."

"The bed isn't very good," said the woman. "But you'll get clean sheets, I'll change them after dinner." She left. The boy lingered. He was going to help the signor with the luggage. I explained that all my things were in these two saddlebags. The boy seemed disappointed. But he wasn't pushy. "The door has no lock," he said bluntly, "and there is no running water. The pump is out in the yard. Are you having dinner here?"

"What are you having for dinner?"

The boy was silent, confused.

"Yes, I'm going to eat here," I said.

An old woman was scrubbing laundry in the yard and a group of children were huddled around her. "Who is that?" she hissed as I passed. One of the children whispered something in her ear. It was as if the child had said, "He comes from another planet," but she replied, "Yes. Make sure he doesn't knock over the water bucket."

"Buona sera, signora."

The wrinkles on the old woman's face tightened grimly, she muttered a sullen reply and continued scrubbing.

A steady, rhythmic click-click hung in the sickly air. At first I couldn't figure out where it was coming from, but then I discovered a spot of white light on the other side of the yard. I peeked through the window of a room full of pulsating machine parts. A young woman watched me between gleaming metal bars. I knocked on the door, she nodded, and I stepped in.

She was weaving. The old-fashioned loom filled the entire room like a clockwork fills its case; the woman, slender and sweet and very pale in the harsh electric light, adjusted the shuttle and bobbin, skillfully knot-

ting broken threads. She was weaving rayon silk. A cylindrical container next to the loom rotated slowly, winding up the shiny fabric that shone softly like polished brass. We shouted over the clatter:

"Factory nearby... we do... piecework..."

"But it's late... almost eight..."

"I finish at eight... start again... seven tomorrow."

There was a trattoria in the dilapidated house, a sort of combined bar and dining room, a shabby jam. It consisted of a long room, a few tables and a tattered bar counter where a few men stood and drank. The boy was in charge of the service. He poured drinks with the luxuriant elegance of a professional, carefully counted the money before putting it in a table drawer and fiddled with the valves on a huge chrome-nickel coffee maker. He was very proud. You couldn't see his shorts behind the counter.

The customers were farmers and farm workers. A couple of them came up to me at the door. One was slender, had sloping shoulders, a sharp triangular face and a wide drunken grin. The comrade formed a solid contrast. I pointed to a house wall across the street where someone had written "VV Bartali". "Who is Bartali?" I asked.

The big man smiled with white teeth. "A cyclist. A world-famous racing cyclist. In his time, Bartali was a champion, a champion of champions - he beat the French, the Swiss, the Belgians - the whole bunch."

"Now he's old - vecchio" said the other one emotionally. "He doesn't compete anymore. The legs, you see. The years are taking their toll..."

The conversation flowed easily. It didn't matter that my Italian was bad and their English even worse. We illustrated the words with gestures. The desire to understand was there. I said: "Italians are considered good workers."

"But there's a shortage of work in Italy," the big man replied.

"Yes, it's bad." The other's cheerful grin died away. "Too many people - troppo del popoli. In order not to lose your job, you have to do the work of two or three people. It only works for the strong or the skilled." He spat twice in quick succession. "Some people emigrate - if they can. I have a brother in Belgium. Haven't seen him for six years - sei ani." He

held up a row of bony and crooked fingers. “He earns well, works in a steel mill.”

A piece of leather flapped silently past us. Somewhere over Como, the clouds were tearing sparks from the mountaintops. I wondered if he was unemployed.

“In Italy, nothing is as it should be,” said the big man, switching feet. He had a stubborn square chin. “Everything is a mess. Life is merciless.”

The other nodded like a parrot. “E molto diff icili - very difficult. Too much politics, signore.” He made a slight overture and the smile returned: “Too many... combinazioni...”

Dinner was served. The signora in her threadbare dress hurried between the tables with soup and bread. The boy sat at the table among the men and spoke with dignity like a grown-up to someone like him. The others didn’t say much as they sipped steaming, aromatic brodo. A shutter began to creak and flap in the stiffening breeze and suddenly stood wide open against the blaze of distant lightning.

I began to feel at ease. I was content to sit here among simple people, away from all false pretensions and a world of calculating kindness. It was wonderful to come down to Italy from the north.

The old woman rushed about on her fragile stilts. Once a little girl came stumbling after her, she could barely walk, stood there in the middle of the room and stared with round eyes until she lost her balance and fell. But she didn’t scream. One of the men was quickly there to help the child up. Something unapproachable - almost a smile - touched the hard bearded faces of the diners.

After dinner they played cards. A group of young men - their black hair was shiny wet - had come in and flocked around the gamblers and gave unsolicited advice. And the talkative couple hung around the bar again. He with the drunken grin insisted, chattering, that I should keep them company. But it was getting late.

I paid for food and lodging and was about to go up to the room when il padrone wanted to speak to me. It was a pleasant and bright-eyed man in his forties. “Would you be so kind as to give me your passport,” he said. “It’s for the check. In case the police come...”

"I'd rather not. I always carry my passport with me. But if you wish, I can write down your name and date for you..."

The murmuring died down. The men paused in their card game and listened.

"It's for the police," the host resumed without raising his voice. "It's the same for me, signore. But..."

He had no travel book. So I wrote on a piece of crumpled paper.

The scratching of my pen filled the silence in the room. The men seemed curious and slightly amused as il padrone read my name - backwards.

"And you're an American, then..."

"Yes."

"Your passport is issued in America..."

"No, in Paris."

"In France? But if you live in America, how can . . . "

"I'm traveling. I came here from Sweden."

"Sweden!" The host threw his arms up in the air. He burst out laughing. "Non comprendo. Allora." He shook his head good-naturedly. "May I ask the police to knock on your door if they want to know more?"

The window in my room had blown open. It lay like a splatter of varnish on the unpainted boards. I rigged up a loop in place of the nonexistent hook, hung the raincoat over the window so as not to be bothered by the constant lightning, and crawled into bed. The last thing I was aware of was the pattering and slapping of rain on the roof.

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I traveled without haste, following the winding roads, from villages to towns and from towns to cities and then out into the countryside again.

For a few days I traveled almost perpendicular to the high wall of

mountains. Before me rounded soft green hills, behind them rose a barrier of abrupt, rugged blue-green precipices that were streaked with gray on the bare crests, and beyond them in an unreal distance tumbled a golden-brown chaos, radiant in the sunlight, speckled with snow and crowned with woolly clouds.

The road turned southeast and skirted the first steep slopes. On either side lay cornfields. The green-brown cobs clung to the bare stalks like great beetles. Laurel trees and grapevines grew by the roadside. In the meadows the hay lay loosely raked in the low stubble where new grass was sprouting. And where the hay had been hauled and stacked by the houses, the earth was freshly plowed, black and shiny.

I liked to set out early in the mornings, while it was still damp and cold, before the grass and foliage had lost their dewy glitter and become stiff with dust. I pedaled slowly and let the road take me where it wanted. What did it matter if I ended up a little too far east or south or west? Everything except the north was new to me. And I didn't need to hurry. It was wonderful to have time to travel! As the sun rose the landscape began to steam. The mist crept into the valleys that split the lush green hills. And in the valleys or on green, friendly slopes lay little villages huddled around their churches. The churches were like shepherds and the houses their silent, obedient flocks. And the shepherds' voices rang out commandingly for miles across the country.

Then followed a swathe of scrubby slopes and ravines thick with bracken. On the edge of a deep ravine sat a parched little man crouched by the road. He had placed his sickle on a rock and was in the process of flattening the jagged edge. The hammer rose and fell, and the dull thuds echoed in the sun-baked ravine. Then everything was drowned out by the steady, growing drone of a truck on the curve. It roared past, engulfing the farmer in a cloud of thick black oily smoke. But when the air cleared, he was there again - with his hammer.

Farther away lay a valley and two parallel cables swung across it in elegant sweeps. Towers of steel beams stood like sentinels on the wooded slopes, and between them an endless procession of small wagons sped back and forth across the peaceful blue sky - full of iron ore they parad-

ed in one direction, empty they returned, making a slippery clicking sound as they passed a split in the cable and swung away towards the mine shafts on the scarred red-faced mountaintop.

I sat under a tree by the roadside, eating grapes. It was so peaceful and quiet. In the distance there was a rhythmic clip-clap-clap. A horse came pulling an empty haystack. Between the high wheels a young man in blue overalls and a soft straw hat was swinging. Two girls tramped along laughing. He was engaged in a flirtation with them. The girls were reluctant to get into the carriage, but they didn't want him to drive away from them either. A faint smell of barnyard wafted towards me through the warm air. I admired the robust, stately youth, the slender and graceful women with their long, shimmering locks that fell softly over their shoulders. It was so true - the Italians are a beautiful people. I wanted to imagine these people full of life and strength, happy in the sun.

Happy in the sun... A sunlit garden where a strange, ancient people experience happiness - that's how one could imagine Italy. The landscape, blooming and green, undulating under the clear sky, the picturesque villages on its hills. And yet... Yet there are shadows that make the picturesque meaningless. On the walls of many poor gray houses the hammer and sickle, perhaps a star, clumsily painted or sharply carved, shines blood red on the cracked, dirty gray plaster.

The road plowed through one village after another. They were all the same - a porridge of stone and brick, cut through by narrow alleys that were crowded with children or adults with gloomy faces. And the churches always above, as if crouched on the roofs, dominating everything...

Wherever I went, the people were inquisitive. A hundred-headed inquisitiveness. "E tedesce, e tedesce, signore - are you German?" People who constantly wanted to know things. People who asked, who came to one without the slightest pretext. "E tedesce - Sind Sie Deutsch?" Some preferred to ask in German. They used to grin like monkeys and flock around me and the bicycle. Strange faces, grinning monkeys. Which became even stranger when I said "Sono americano". Under the thin ve-

neer of mastery lurked astonishment and uncertainty. War and foreign occupation have made Europeans in general and Italians in particular unusually cautious. Trust between people was shaken, there was no sincerity and straightforwardness in social interactions. It certainly happened that a few Italians treated the stranger with understanding, they were amiable. "Habiamo visto molto, noi italiani - we have seen a lot. Gli tedesce, inglese, americani... guerra, molto guerra," they said frankly. But when I answered the question of my nationality, they usually became evasive, reserved. And finally I started saying "Sono da Swezia - from Sweden". Then the mood lightened a little. But I felt inauthentic, uneasy.

I checked into an albergo that was more neglected than old. It smelled of mold and sour beer. There was no blanket on the bed so I asked for one - the nights were cold.

"A blanket, si signore," said the landlord's slimy and fat daughter. "But first you must write the name in the book... "

"I would rather unpack before it gets dark, there is something wrong with the electric light. Besides, I have all my papers in my luggage..."

The signorina knew about the lamp. "We'll sort that out later," she said. "Just bring out his papers..."

And I brought them out. In a room that resembled a furnished cellar, the signorina had spread out a large hotel notebook with red covers on the table. A boy was also sitting on the table. He had bristly black hair and a pointed nose. A man came in. He wore a tattered peaked cap over a pale, hollow-eyed face. The trio crowded around me and the travel book.

"Here is the surname," - the host's daughter pointed with a gnarled finger. "And then the father's and mother's names..."

"What do they have to do with..." I exclaimed, but stopped myself and wrote.

"And the nationality here," the man said, blowing beer fumes down my neck. The boy stared at the hotel notebook incomprehensively.

"Americano," murmured the signorina.

The beer drinker's yellow face twisted into a mocking grimace. "If

you're American then..."

"So what?" I pored diligently through the columns. Three pairs of eyes fixed to every syllable. They almost squinted with suspicion. But their eyes were dull with intellectual incapacity.

As I walked up the creaking, musty wooden stairs, I saw three dark heads leaning over the book...

Enmity is also a kind of bond between people, I thought. Hatred and dislike bind people together more tightly than sympathy. And by binding, they separate.

Here people travel around and want to make contact with different peoples. But that sounds better than it tastes. For in this day when the world should finally be open to everyone and be characterized by understanding and community, it is full of locked cubicles. People are expected - and are kept - to work only among their own people, to think as their own people think, to condemn and hate those whose lives are not like their own. And the gentle animosity among people is spreading more and more - under all the cordiality and tourist friendliness, antipathy is growing...

It is because of their own nationalism that the Italians emphasize the nationality of foreigners. For centuries they have lived under threat or been dominated by Austria, Spain and France. Now they consider themselves robbed of the colonies and Trieste. They trust no one. The breeding ground for curiosity is distrust and resentment.

One evening in a ristorante I got into an argument with the owner who, in my opinion, had shamelessly upstaged me. He got what he wanted. As I was leaving, he and several male customers shouted mockingly: "Guten Abend!"

"Not guten Abend - good night" I said.

"Ah" snorted the host. "Guten Abend, good night, bonsoir - it's the same shit."

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It was easy to get away. Down, ever downwards towards the plains. The air was luminous, woven through with a rosy shimmer. Far to the west the sky blazed in orange - it was the sun's trail. Like a prairie fire rolling in the light wind below the horizon. The tonal glow over the plains formed a delicate transition from brilliance and sharp shadow to shadowless half-light. Everything seemed so simple, so full of peace. The earth had bared itself to the night, welcoming the night as it greets the day - without a doubt.

And yet there was someone who felt fear... No wild animals were seen; in the Italian countryside one becomes aware of their absence. A few birds flying over the fields or the forest, the echo of an unnaturally sharp bang, a man on a motorbike with a rifle on his back... No, Italy is certainly no place for nature lovers - at least not for people who are used to seeing animals and birds in freedom, untouched. But you don't go to Italy to study wildlife. Down here, the land is precious and severely exploited, over-humanized. Nature matters only to the extent that it serves man.

In some places, the factories formed communities that were independent of the cities. Most of them were newly built cement boxes with hard lines and many windows. And they seemed so forlorn. The factories and the houses that clung to them like leeches and the scarred ground around them - desolate and out of place. It felt disheartening to meet the vanguard of industry and know inside that they were advancing in all their hideous ugliness, like leprosy in the landscape. If only the earth could have swallowed up the damned boxes, I thought. Here in the Italian countryside, the factories were like accidents. The life lived in their shadow was petty and mean. The fault lay elsewhere. But the evidence was here.

One of the communities was located at a crossroads where the highway cut through cornfields and meadows. In one corner - a brick, glass and chrome factory with sliding doors, blinds and a paved driveway between piles of rubbish. Opposite the piles of rubbish - a row of whitewashed workers' homes with built-in balconies that resembled rusty bathtubs with laundry hanging to dry. The gates were crowded

with children, while old people sat slumped and stared listlessly at the factory on the other side of the road.

A lone man sits on an iron railing. He has flaming red hair. A small conical head, large elephant ears, a flat and freckled nose - and a fringe of fiery red hair.

"Buon gior -." I've barely opened my mouth before I understand what's going on. He doesn't answer, just grins idiotically, squints with his shiny little eyes, puts both hands to his ears and waves his fingers...

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It was evening when I arrived at a village. They were building new houses on the outskirts among dilapidated shacks. All new miniature factories. And decay had set in while the construction work was still going on. They had no dignity, these Italian post-war houses, at least not here in the countryside.

People were wandering the streets. Clusters of shabbily dressed men with their hands in their trouser pockets glared darkly at the stranger. They huddled in gloomy crowds outside a house with a cream-colored stucco facade, la camera di Lavoro. Later I would realize that they were not hostile, just downtrodden and confused and worried about their livelihood. They belonged together and kept all the outcasts at bay...

I couldn't find a place to stay. They were strangely reluctant at the inns, unfriendly, full of evasions. What to do? Eight kilometers to the nearest town, and no guarantee of getting a night's lodging there either. On the outskirts of the village I stop and hesitate. Across the street is a milk shop, maybe someone in the shop can help me? A young woman in white scrubs the floor. "No signore", she says. "I'm from another village. I don't know anyone here..."

Next door is a machine shop. But no mechanic. "He's out," announces a little boy cheerfully riding barefoot on a battered motorbike.

Il barbiere has his hands full. One customer is getting waxed and

soaped, two others are waiting their turn. And an apprentice in his teens dutifully studies the barber's hand movements as he smooths his razor.

"Scusi, signori, but can any of you tell me where I can get a room for the night?"

"Try the hotel around the corner -"

"I've done that, and several other places - I've asked everywhere..."

"Yes, in that case," says one of the waiting men with a shrug.

"Non e facile", adds the other. They are primitive types, migratory agricultural workers, their faces and hands still glowing from the sun's rays.

"But maybe..." I linger. "Maybe some private individual might want to..."

"I have no idea -"

"No."

"Maybe Signora Tasso?" the barber wonders, stopping his razor halfway. He is roughly built, with a soft, pretty face and curly brown hair. He has rolled up his shirt sleeves and is working without a cardigan.

"Tasso... who knows..."

"Or Bianchi?" the customer in the barber's chair spits through his fluffy mustache. "They live next to the post office, in the party house."

An exchange of words ensues during which the names Tasso and Bianchi bounce back and forth very lively. The barber has abandoned his half-shaven customer and is trying to clarify for me where Signora Tassa lives. "You should follow the street until you come to it the new hotel, the one built of brick. This is how you take off ... " He waves the razor menacingly close to one of my ears.

"No, no, no. He'll never find it. Better to try Bianchi's."

"Absolutely not. Look here ... " One of the workers takes out a pencil. He takes a weathered magazine from the hat rack and starts drawing on the cover. "This is the street where we are now. And that's where the hotel is. The cross street is unpaved ... "

"Second house from the corner," shouts the barber, wanting the last word.

"Best to go to the post office first. The Bianchis live in the house next door where the Communist Party has its offices. They'll probably have a room to rent," insists the soaped-up man. Everyone is loudly helpful.

"That house is easy to find," laughs the workers.

As I cycle back into the village, guided by the piece of paper, I feel inexplicably excited. There's never a long way between disappointment and joy when travelling in Italy. In my attempts to get a grip on the diverse customs of Italians, I've become increasingly convinced of how similar they are fundamentally. Italians rarely live in isolation - over-population doesn't allow it. They're constantly together, at work and at play. Their pronounced, often exuberant sociability contributes greatly to making their hard life bearable.

Signora Tasso is subdued and friendly. She has a nice little room that I can get for three hundred lire a night. But how did I know? Who gave me the address? Well, the barber? She's reticent.

"It's not easy to get accommodation in the village," says me.

"No, it's not easy," the woman answers calmly. "The houses were bombed. The war. Many dead. Now people often have to stay in hotels..."

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In northern Italy the plains are endless and rich. How strange they were, the immeasurable open spaces! I had never seen anything like these northern Italian plains, I could not imagine myself living and working here. But when I saw them resting silent and featureless in the cold morning mist, I felt that they could be irresistible. A ploughman and his oxen are just small dots on the sea of earth. And yet as if rooted in the soil! The fog lifts during the day, the sun's disk sinks into the

evening haze, the wind that waves over the expanses is warm and heavy with the scent of freshly cut hay, drying corn and freshly ploughed soil...

The plain is rich. One is amazed at its wealth. And those who own the land are rich, fabulously rich. Some of them live in the area of Bergamo and Brescia in huge palaces protected by walls, moats and iron gates. But usually the manors are inhabited by overseers. The landlord is away, he met in Rome, on the Riviera, abroad.

A little way from the highway, large irregular building complexes - comune - houses on two or three floors with one short wall cut away as if to form a spacious balcony. The comune houses are built of sun-dried clay, white-yellow or yellow-brown clay, with roofs of black-spotted tiles. They had the gentle patina of age, they were in the true sense of the word dwellings, they seemed at the same time dignified and humble. On the balconies lay drying corn in large yellow and orange piles that glowed in the unreal light of the sunset. Between the wide rows of stone barns, haystacks towered like angular ancient huts. And here and there were the ruins of shriveled brown corn stalks.

I came to such a comune by the highway. Comune di Villa Baldini it was called. It was a day with leaden, dirty-gray clouds that promised rain. The nearest village was far away, you couldn't see much more than the church spire over the fields in the distance. There was a sign on the house: Trattoria. I went in. At first a dirty, cold, empty room. But deeper into the darkness a large hall opened up where a crowd of men were sitting at table. On two long green-covered tables were bottles and plates. The men were eating dinner. The ceilings were high, like in a church, the pointed arches of the walls formed small alcoves, there were darkened paintings hanging on the rough plaster. Even the air inside was heavy with the past.

The diners were agricultural workers, men with calloused fists and weathered skin and the shadow of stubble on rough furrowed faces. Their features had aged prematurely, their bodies were strong and sinewy in their patched but clean clothes. Some wore rumpled straw or felt hats, others leaned on short sticks, almost all wore red or blue or green

rags wrapped around their bare necks. They seemed somehow distant, they had a mournful dignity. Like the air in the old cellar-like room, they belonged to a bygone era. They must have sat there in the same way a long time ago. They were exactly the same. Time stood still here... This house and these people have not changed. There is still a Villa Baldini and a Comune di Villa Baldini. And between them an iron gate.

I watched the eating men. I had seen them crossing the fields behind ox-drawn ploughs and carts and met them as they went home in the evenings with antiquated rakes and scythes on their shoulders. And I had taken everything for granted. They were as much a part of the landscape as the grass and the trees... But now I was filled with wonder. The relationship between these hard-working people and the rich soil, between the mansions and this smoky refectory had suddenly struck me. I wanted to know more about them. What did they live for? Work and bread? Did they find anything other than their livelihood in work. Did they have plans and hopes or were they content to obey as they had done for millennia? I tried in vain to find the truth in their world. The stone floor beneath my feet was worn, rough, and full of cracks. In a shady corner stood a pot-bellied water barrel.

The atmosphere was thick with hostility, isolating me in my own alienation. The workers took no notice of me. And then the shrunken, crooked host came in and hurt his dry bird's head: "No, you must go to the village..." The expressionless, watery eyes of the others regarded me without either hatred or sympathy.

It had begun to rain, large drops that burst and ran hot down the face. The clouds dragged like matted rags on the peaceful, dormant plain. Behind the house a pig grunted. I hung up my raincoat and rolled away, hissing, along the gleaming silver ribbon of the road.

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"The Italian peasants are generally not politically conscious, they

don't think," said a man in Brescia. He owned a well-ordered little bookstore and was very talkative. "In this part of the country the peasants are socialists," he said, "disappointed socialists who have become communists, but socialists nonetheless. They are a political factor to be reckoned with. But as far as being individually awake ..." he shook his head. - "No. They have almost no ideas of their own. They are too strictly occupied with earning their living to be really thinking people. In political matters they follow their party leaders."

"Are they well organized?" I asked.

"Yes, to the extent that they can give vent to their discontent but not enough to be able to enforce their demands. Some time ago the farm workers went on strike. They lost. The landlords imported labor from other regions. Many of the new ones stayed here. Now there is not enough work for everyone. Sometimes people work only half the week. They earn two or three thousand lire ..."

"Per day?"

"No then, for their half week. And they can't possibly deserve more, they never will as long as the local organizations haven't united in a central union..."

I wondered why the Italian peasants were against unification, since they had basically similar problems.

"That's true," said the signor. "They are usually dispossessed and have the same difficulties. But as for unity... They have never been united. The first opportunity that presented itself - the Risorgimento - they let slip, or rather - it passed beyond their horizon. The idealists who wanted to create a United Democratic Italy were honest people. But their preaching was too unrealistic and grandiose to arouse sympathy among the land-bound peasants. And the peasant class in Italy - well, that's the majority of the people."

I asked him if he thought the new liberalism was also too loose in the flesh.

"No," he said. "No, it is probably practicable - or would be if you could reach all the peasants. Here in Emilia they have been socialists for a very long time. Before the First World War they already had their

socialist communes, they managed to extract certain concessions from the landowners, even the government had to reckon with them. The mistake was that the socialists fought among themselves. A lot of party factions hostile to each other - that's why socialism does not dominate Italy. Too many vested interests and party cronies and tricks... That's how fascism got its chance. The riots of 1915 and the war that we did not want to wage and did not manage to win and even more confusion among the socialists and... ecco - il fascismo!"

"But the people have certainly learned a lot since then," I said. "They have learned from experience..."

"Some, others not," replied the bookseller. "The people of Emilia learned many bitter lessons under fascism because the development before Mussolini had made them receptive to lessons. In southern Italy the problem is different. There they live for the day but behind their time. They are all monarchists because the monarchy combined pomp and show with food and drink. They are neo-fascists because fascism, by and large, only reached them in the form of promises. Now there are people who want to mix up monarchism and fascism in the hope of getting not only their daily bread but a lot of other things - bridges and roads and houses and colonies... The southern Italians are backward and emotional. They really believe the propaganda phrase that 'the fascists did not have time to implement their reform program'. What to do? They do not understand any better. They stubbornly cling to the only symbols of security they have known - the throne and the church. The gentlemen tell them that they are happy because they have work and a place to live, and the priests add that such is life, one must be grateful to God for letting him toil and drag one along. And they believe this and continue to obey. What is to be done with such people?"

"Do you really think that nothing can be done?" I asked. "Will Italy never experience unity and progress?"

"Oh, it is certainly progressing," he said. "No doubt about it. Italy is well on the way to socialism. But the question is: What kind of socialism and at what price? We have not come very far, considering our bitter disappointments and terrible experiences. If only we could cover the

remaining stretch of road without such terrible experiences, it would feel like a great relief."

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The lake lay gleaming in a veil of water vapor under the clear morning sky. Thanks to the low banks, it seemed larger than it actually is - the houses and the green border on the other side were vaguely outlined through the haze or mists that still hovered over the water. As if suspended between the banks, motionless or slowly drifting with the current, many small boats could be seen.

I sat on a bank and looked down into a crystal-clear and wavy channel of water that rippled through a lock to another smaller lake. Down there, the hand-towel undulated and dark shapes darted through the seaweed on the sandy bottom. A row of bollards formed a kind of fence across it and a slender, sharp-stemmed canoe was pressed against them by the current. The man in the canoe He was fencing with a long boat hook whose upper end ended in a paddle oar. He swung the paddle in the air and drove the boat hook down into the whirlpools and sometimes he leaned forward and peered into the shallow water, squeezed the rod, pulled up a small conical basket, threw the squirming fish into the canoe and lowered the basket with line and stone weight into the stream again. He was dressed in short black rubber boots, bushy orange trousers that bagged around the knees like golf trousers and a wide-brimmed hat made of coarse straw. The narrow canoe swayed in the current and the fisherman kept his balance while he concentrated on his work.

Several Russians were lying piled up on the canal bank and next to them in the dew-drenched grass sat an older man. The cap on his gray bald head was much too small, his trousers and shirt were too tight around his round midriff. He had gray walrus mustaches and flared a a small, stiff pipe with a silver-plated head. The smoke curled around

him, his sideburns twitched gaily on his jovial face. "Yes," he said, "this river flows into the Po. And over there, on the other side of the town" - he pointed - "is a third lake..."
He watched the canoe intently as it glided toward the shore.

"Are there many fish in the lakes?"

"Yes. Look for yourself..."

The fisherman had gone ashore and scooped up eels from a bucket amidships in the green-painted canoe. He grabbed them with his hands - a thick, winding bundle - and dropped them into a wooden box on the shore. Then he quickly went out again and continued his snooping in the seaweed where the eelgrass was hidden.

The old man lit his pipe. The last mists lifted, the outlines of a town on the other shore were etched against the sky. On the pale blue mirror of the lake the canoes were sharply outlined like black arches and in each one a fisherman stood upright between the curved prows.

"What is Mantua famous for?" I asked.

"Famous?" The old man pursed his thick lips. His eyes twinkled humorously. "Famous? I don't know... the town is old and the area is fertile, there is fish ..."

"Is the eel expensive?"

"Five hundred lire per kilo, sold on the spot..." He turned his back to me and shouted something to the man in the canoe and laughed softly at his narrow answer. His sturdy body shook with laughter, the buttons on his stomach almost gave way.

A tall young man in a green wool coat and red rubber boots appeared on the canal bank carrying an ancient and crooked wave of stained brass. His black-musked face was thin and sharp as a car. Two boys on bicycles slowed to a stop at the roadside and admired the canoe as it glided towards the shore again. This time the eels were in a rudder that they filled to the brim. The tall young man climbed into the canoe and helped the fisherman haul his catch ashore. A sheepdog came trotting by and snorted delightedly. The man in the green sweater bent a strong arm and held out his eel, and his companion hung the rudder on the hook and noted the weight on a piece of paper. Then the eels were

poured into the wooden box like a bubbling yellow-gray and glittering silver-white magma. The young man sat down in the grass next to the old man and the fisherman in his rickety craft glided away from the shore once more.

Mantua is a mixture of old and new, quiet peace and deafening noise. In the old town the houses lean against each other over narrow sunless steps. There it is teeming with carabinieri crouching with pleasure and beautiful dark women, a traffic policeman stands white and self-conscious in the motley noisy stream of vehicles. You dive through the steps and come out on a piazza, a vast open space lined with solemn buildings with sculpted and columned facades. The paving stones have settled and the grass grows between the stone and the sun. It is exceptionally peaceful in the piazza, you are amazed by the sudden silence. And the change from darkness to light is abrupt, almost a shock.

The largest house on the piazza is a castle. It is located on the outskirts of the town, on the edge of a long treeless slope towards one of the lakes. The highway to Ferrara curves past it. When I arrived on my bike, some workers were busy leveling the ground there. They were loading dry brown soil onto a dump truck. They were dumping shovelfuls of soil onto the massive metal hull. Right next to it, a bulldozer was humming and growling. It crawled up the slope like a yellow monster, pushing a mound of earth in front of it, stopping only to change direction, swaying.

In the middle of the hill lay a badly worn ruin - four columns with four arches gathered under a cornice, a kind of miniature temple. Weeds were growing on the cornice and one of the pillars had a very risky slope. The ruin was harmonious, a poem.

The cars sped past me, the workers had finished loading, the bulldozer was grunting and digging in ever-tighter circles around the ruin.

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In Italy, cities not only have their own faces, they have different personalities. And different moods. One town may be carefree and friendly and easygoing, another tired to death or just generally sleepy, a third gloomy and inhibited. Like Revere, for example.

A bridge of steel beams spanned the muddy, viscous Po. An unpaved street led to a crowd of dejected ugly houses. They stood there as they had been placed, half-finished or half-ruined, the difference was small.

I felt depressed. Maybe it was the darkness. The houses had seemed gloomy from the river side, but now that I was among them I understood that they were finished; finished, broken. Everywhere lamps gleamed with a weak, brittle light as if they had been deep, deep in cold niches of night. There were no cars to be seen, the few people you met on the street seemed worryingly shabby. The whole town seemed to be sinking under a terrifying weight...

A group of young rascals on a street corner grinned defiantly, a shabbily dressed figure followed me to an albergo and waited until I came out again with unfinished business.

"No rooms available, huh?"

"No..."

"But the gentleman wants a room, huh. Ah, I know. And I can help. Come with me..." The slob swung his arm. He was barely middle-aged but his face was already ruined. And he staggered and waved his hands in his fringed sleeves and repeated with exaggerated self-confidence: "I'll help you. Come..."

He showed me the way to a collapsed shack where a plump-breasted young tramp led me up to a large, icy room, a veritable morgue with three enormous beds. "I don't want to lie here like a corpse," I thought, and said aloud, "No, this won't do..."

"You won't find anything else in Revere, signore. Nothing," the slob hissed, his confidence now bold and threatening. The crow stood hunched over beside him, fists clenched.

"Well, I guess I'll just have to continue..."

"It'll get worse for you," he hissed. "Yes, it will. Long roads..." And he flapped his arms like a jumping jack toy.

Before leaving Revere, I asked a white-haired shoemaker where I could get a bite to eat. He pointed to a small hut that boasted the sign RISTORANTE. It was just an unpainted wooden shed with a large table in the middle, unplaned benches around it, and a smaller, smoke-filled beam in the back.

A man emerged from the smoke and I asked what was available to eat.

"Anything my master desires," he began - and added more definitively: "spaghetti". He set out a large portion of spaghetti "al rago" on the unpainted table.

"Wine?"

"No, birra."

"There isn't any -"

"Then I'll have wine."

He brought in a carafe of red wine. He was a man in his late middle years, hard as flint, with hairy, muscular forearms. His shirt was taut like a drum skin over his powerful chest. The marked features indicated boldness, even ruthlessness - they were grim, repulsive. And at the bottom of his gray-brown eyes, beneath the boldness, lurked pain. He lit a cigarette absentmindedly and said: "You wonder about my ristorante, don't you? It's only temporary, until I can build a better one..."

"So you used to have -"

"Yes. And a nice one. Here, in the same corner. When I came home from the war -" he made a deliberate pause - "nothing. Not a stone on a stone. Bombs. The whole city bombed to hell -"

"Who did it?"

"All of them. Englishmen, Americans, Germans. But mostly the Americans. It was the bridge. They bombed the bridge. Are you German?"

"No, American..."

"Americano." He repeated the word as if he had weighed it. The features hardened in his dark face. "I speak a little English... but not well. I used to know more. Now I'm beginning to forget. For six years I was a prisoner of the English, gli inglese. I worked on the veldt, in

Africa, near Cape Town. They caught me in Dakar and I worked for them, for the English. All that damn long day, everlasting day, in the hot sun of the great veldt. A rich man owned the land and we, the prisoners, worked for him. For the rich man." He stared at me and the pain lurked like an accusation in his eyes. He crossed his arms over his broad chest and rocked lightly on strong, supple legs. "After dinner, when I returned home..." He bit off the packet and blew out a cloud of smoke. "But I intend to build a new one. It will cost a lot, but I will do it. In due time-".

Three cadres clambered in and ordered spaghetti. They were dirty, red-faced and hoarse, probably construction workers. The largest of the three was quite worn out. He spun large bundles of spaghetti into his mouth, washed them down with wine and was finished long before the others. Then he started laughing loudly at them and joking with il padrone who replied dryly and matter-of-factly. To me he said:

"You are not Italian, you do not eat spaghetti like an Italian."

"No", I said, "I do not."

"Americano", the host said grimly and added something in dialect, so quickly that I did not have time to understand it.

"We have seen many of your kind", said the large adult and pointed upwards. "Up there - heh heh". He laughed hoarsely and turned to his comrades. "Am I not right perhaps?" They did not answer and bent deeper over their plate. "Surely I am right?" he muttered mushyly and scratched his leg.

I quickly finished my meal and stood up.

"Two hundred and forty lire," said the host. Which was mostly enough for just spaghetti "al rago" and wine. I paid and kept my comments to myself. "Even with such prices it will be a long time before you see your new fine ristorante, my harsh signore!"

Night had fallen. Small, harsh and joyless lamps burned among angular shadows. And over the rough lattice of the trees the bridge rose like a black spider's web, ominous in the night.

"The bridge. They bombed the bridge..."

And that had happened ten years ago, I thought in despair. The tat-

tered walls of bombed houses rose jagged against the warm, soft indigo sky of the south.

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If Revere had been depressing, Bondeno was cheerful and happy. The whole neighborhood resembled a well-tended garden cut through by ditches. But the garden was a vast plain and ditched canals. The black, shiny soil undulated towards the horizon, the road lost its meaning in infinity, even the canals failed to fence in the vast areas. Nothing could rob the landscape of its endless unity.

I had learned to love the immeasurable sun-bleached fields, their eternal flickering haze of sunshine and melancholy stillness. They lay wide open under the bare sky. And the people out there - the people too seemed to be in harmony with the earth and the sky.

Sugar beets are grown between Revere and Bondeno and the harvest was in full swing, that is, the after-harvest. The work teams moved across the fields as if in a broken line of fire, along the stacks of harvested beets. They were mostly women with scarves around their heads, they carried long knives curved like sickles. They stabbed the tip of the knife into the beet, lifted it into the air, grabbed it with the other hand and cut the green tops. It was done in one quick and precise hand movement. Bending forward, cutting, lifting, grabbing and cutting. Bending, lifting, cutting. A team of women advancing across the fields working in wordless harmony.

The road ran alongside a canal, the irrigation channels were navigable canals. The water was brackish and stagnant, the canal banks were lined with reeds and water lilies. There were ducks in the reeds. And there were geese everywhere, they came sailing like magnificent armadas on the mirror-shiny canal, they crawled wobbly ashore and shook their tails and stretched their long, slender necks and chattered terribly - and then they went back to sea in dull resentment at the troublemakers on the highway.

It was ten, sometimes twenty meters across the canal to the poor farms. Here and there the houses clustered together and formed a sort of comune. And then there was a halt of a kilometer or more to the next farm on the water's edge or far away in the flat fields. Where two canals met there were pumping stations and brick buildings that hummed and buzzed. A little further still I drove into a small village and stopped at a trattoria to drink a glass of beer. I asked if there were any towns in the neighborhood.

"No. Bondeno is eleven kilometers from here. It's just wasteland all around ..." and the girl waved her hand - "Il paese sperduto."

So I rode my horse in the warm, windless evening, thinking to myself that summer here in the area must be terrible, and wondering what it would feel like to work in the fields when the sun was at its hottest.

A group of boys had gathered on a burnt canal bank, staring at something below the cliff. A rough-limbed youth with a wildly spreading lion's mane spotted me and shouted "Macchina kaput, camarato". Which was the truth of the day. A blue automobile had landed in a very precarious situation right on the water's edge. The radiator was crushed, one headlight was gone, a cushion was lying in the grass. It was a miracle that the wreckage had not continued down into the canal.

"When did it happen?"

"This morning."

"Was anyone killed?"

"No, camarato, not even injured..." I said a little disappointed.

On many of the cottages by the road, written in red paint was VV PAX M GUERRA. And quite often you could see the hammer and sickle shining blood red on the poor walls. It seemed strange in some way - the liberating boundless sunny expanses of the landscape, the profound silence, the poor gray-white huts with the red symbols shining like blood. And the landscape so still, so full of peace...

In the distance, a grove of trees and a massive building complex were outlined. White smoke billowed from two tall factory chimneys. An endless line of vehicles - trucks, semi-trailers, horse-drawn carts, trac-

tors with heavy trailers - waited on the highway. All were loaded with sugar beets. All stood still or moved like the carriages in a train set. An endless caravan that started and stopped only to start and stop again, slowly creeping away towards the factories and the smoke. But mostly it was waiting. Coachmen and drivers left their vehicles and gathered to talk. A guy was sleeping in the grass by the ditch. Another was raking horse manure from the road where his horse was sitting, sighing in the feed bag. On the other side of the road, someone had set up a fruit stand and was leaving - probably to chat away the time with the other guys. Suddenly, the line of vehicles began to stretch out, creaking. People were climbing onto their loads, the engines were coughing. The column moved, a meter, two meters. Stop again. Infinitely far away, the factory gates loomed. And on the other side of the gates, another line crawled in the opposite direction. The caravans were moving towards the same point from two directions, pushing their way laboriously through the factory while other cars and carts rolled out the back loaded with blue-green dripping waste.

I asked a truck driver how long it took to get into the factory.

"Oh, that'll take a while..."

"How long?"

"Well, half a day, maybe a day..."

"But it's Sunday..."

"It doesn't matter during the harvest -"

The farmer was a short distance from the sugar mill. It turned out to be a neat little town with very few shabby neighborhoods. A large public meeting was in full swing when I arrived. The newspaper L'Unita was the organizer. A youthful deputation of boys and girls under red banners trotted along the wide main street past a park with a spinning carousel. People stopped to watch them march by, and a gramophone in the park blared out a sentimental tune that didn't quite fit the piece. There was a large crowd at the town hall. In a wooden barracks that looked like a country elementary school, there was an industrial exhibition - there were radios, motorcycles, furniture, and so on, all of low quality and very provincial in taste. Only a few textiles were artistic

with fresh, lively colors and patterns. At the far end of the town hall courtyard, peasants and workers were sitting at long tables drinking wine. There were plenty of posters and propaganda paraphernalia; special festive issues of L'Unita and magazines dealing with Russian-Italian topics were out front. But the strangest thing of all was the relaxed atmosphere. No carabinieri, no police, no priests, no tension - not the slightest sign of compulsion or disorder. Just people gathered in all friendliness.

I couldn't tell what was behind it. A big-bellied, thoughtful tobacconist standing in front of his little shop, chewing a cigar, said that there were many communists in town. "But they're not like the Russian communists. They're decent people, they don't do anything for no one when..."

Perhaps Bondeno's problems were identical to Italy's, malignant and intractable problems that had been pushed aside in order to experience a brief moment of amiability and good humor. Something was being prepared somewhere - a challenge? - but it wasn't noticeable now.

In the evening there was a ball. The audience consisted mostly of young people who arrived early and queued in front of the ticket office at the entrance. They were beautiful, lively and healthy young people, an unusually sympathetic crowd. And I asked myself: Is the Italian youth but aware of the events that shape it and its future? What role do they themselves play in the course of events?

The lights were turned on, the gates opened, the soft sensual music picked up and the happy crowd poured in.

The children in the park rode round and round in circles on wooden ponies and fire engines and locomotives - to a different tune.

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I had passed Ferrara and Ravenna. The landscape was still flat, an almost imperceptible slope towards the sea somewhere ahead of me

beyond the pine forests. They were strange, these pines. From a distance they resembled gigantic mushrooms and when they grew close together they formed colonnades with thick green roofs. In Ravenna people boasted a lot about the forests, the hotelier in particular. "They are famous," he hissed. "Dante wrote poems about them ... ". For me they were a disappointment. Compared to Nordic forests, the pine groves really have nothing to offer. They lack the mystery and elusive charm of the wild woodlands. I felt as if I were in a park among these Italian pines. And only yellow grass grew between the trees. The pines were beautiful individually, as individuals, welcoming in their own way. But although they gathered in huge groups, they did not form real forests.

The wind blew briskly from the west. It billowed hot and dry over the sunburnt sandy expanses that no one seemed to care about. A large part of the area around here was uncultivated, gravelly and grey. I often saw notice boards with the inscription "TERRA DA VENDERE". There was an ironic ring to the words. Italy should cultivate every single arable square metre of land it owns. But an extensive irrigation system would be needed. And unfortunately, there is none...

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The bush forest on my left seemed to lead into nothingness. And then at last - a steel-blue blade in the greenery. No doubt about it, it was the sea. But it swelled unattainably beyond the thick forest edge, and the country road continued, to my bitter disappointment, to run parallel to the forest. Moreover, the new motorway and the railway next to it kept inland just enough that the sea could always be felt even though it was out of reach. Finally I could control myself no longer and drove onto a side road, a footpath that curved between low trees and dusty bushes. In this way I came down to the sea.

The flat coast floated out into a mile-wide open plain and a yellow-brown Adria splashed and splashed there with small, gnarled

waves. I looked at it with a mixture of joy and astonishment. How desolate everything was! The flat, dusty, sun-dried landscape and the flat sandy beach were unlike anything I had ever seen. And the sea was so flat and desolate with a low yellow edge that rolled in and pushed a thin foam wave in front of it in the sand. The wind from the shore pushed the shallow water back against its will and the swell was like a skin that had been stroked against the grain. It was prickly. At the far end, sea and sky floated together like shimmering dust, everything was mist and formless.

I took off my shoes and waded along the surf, in the lukewarm brackish water. The sand twisted and tickled the soles of my feet. Neither rocks nor seaweed as far as I could see; I missed them immediately. The beach was barren and poor without them. But the water felt refreshing, the air had a faint salty taste, however dry it was, the sun was shining, everything was bathed in sunlight. And not too far away, behind a breakwater, I could make out a forest of masts. . . The path led there, the sand was fine and soft as dust, I had to walk and guide my heavily loaded bicycle. Along the beach lay villas of the angular kind that I have not learned to appreciate. They were whitewashed or cream-colored, they had balconies with iron railings and large windows with shutters and stared blindly out to sea. Some boasted garden plots and lush trees, but most were content with sand. They reminded me of something the tide had brought ashore.

The village was a conglomerate of masts and houses. It looked as if the fishing fleet had sailed up the main street between shops and trattorias and settled down. And suddenly - so it was. The village was divided in two by a long canal with quays that served as both main street and port. Between the brick and travertine quays, ancient boats swarmed, the most picturesque craft imaginable. I had my fill of tackle and rope and cluttered decks and limp nets hanging to dry in the rigging. And what ancient types of ships, strangely curved hulls and bows that arched inward and upward, as if battered by the constant pounding of the waves. Dull white, amber, blue and green boats with starkly contrasting stripes along the railing and swirls of color like dragon eyes on

either side of the swept-in bows...

It was getting close to evening. The harbor was wrapped in the deepest silence. Nets lay spread out on the quays like brown carpets. A man sat bent over tarred nets, a gnarled bronze figure dressed in rags. He had put a flap of net over his knees and was in the process of mending it, and his calloused toes were sticking out through the meshes, which were torn in many places. His hair was like driftwood, his face like old, weathered leather that had long been exposed to the elements. The undershirt and trousers he wore with such nonchalance had seen better days. Indifferent to my staring at him, he let the shuttle run, his strong brown hands seemed to work independently of his will, twisting the coarse thread into hard knots.

"Your net is badly torn,"

"Che?"

"Your net... is torn-"

"Si," the fisherman looked up with clear, sharp eyes set within an even finer network of small wrinkles. "Si, it's torn," he said shortly, and with that I was dismissed.

The quay was extended into two straight breakwaters that extended a distance out into the sea. On one stood a conical red sea mark with a lighthouse and on the other something that looked like a chicken coop on metal stilts. To the south lay the yellow-white plague like a ruler with its border of villas and hotels and bathing huts stuck into the sand. They were simply horrible, these huts in their garish colors, oversized candy canes. And the outdoor cafes behind them and the ghastly, blindly staring villas with their many windows - a damnation without end. Thank God it was September! I shuddered at the thought of what it must be like in the summers with the beach teeming with two-legged creatures who undressed and got sunburned and dressed and got drunk. And started all over again.

I sat on the beach and looked out over the sea. The wind had died down, the water had calmed down and became shiny and polished, brownish-yellow inland, blue-green further out where it was probably very deep. And I thought: "This is the sea. It has the same effect on me

as all the other seas have had...” I remembered them all and my childhood and youth... building ships... The sea no longer shaped my life. But the ties had not been broken, it was by the sea that I felt the need to cooperate with people most strongly...

I turned around and looked at the fishing fleet in the sheltered channel. The fishermen were busy with their boats, more nets had been hauled up into the rigging, a crimson sail billowed in the breeze and merged with the shimmer of the sunset. Yes, here I could rest.

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But how different the little harbor was when I saw it again the next morning! Almost all the boats had sailed out, only an old, battered bark and two high-masted motor trawlers remained at the quay. The street was lined with shops, people were leisurely going about their business. Only a couple of stalls were open in the drafty market hall. They were selling cuts of meat and a slightly richer selection of vegetables. Behind the hall in a piazza without paving sat a few peasant women selling apples and grapes. The fruit was spotted and of the worst kind. And the village, the original port, which lay some distance from the residential areas, was small and poor.

I went down to the beach and walked along the foaming edge of the surf. It had begun to blow from the sea, the waves rushed in over the breaks and splashed and beat. They came rolling in compact waves and broke in angry hissing whirlpools of foam. The water closest to land was yellow again and beyond the precipice it was greenish-gray. The sky had cleared somewhat, the cloud cover had an azure crack. But across the horizon the clouds lay blurry and thick as coal smoke. A storm was approaching. Or had just broken.

I strolled along the shore with my hands in my trouser pockets and stared at the sparkling foam a moment before the sand swallowed it up. A barren beach, but no real coast. There was no driftwood here,

no mussel-bearded rocks, no seagulls. Just small dead crabs and the narrow dirty-gray shells of razor clams. And higher up on the beach the hideous bathing huts and bar services that looked like stuffed cardboard boxes. And a terrible collection of rotten trolleys and deckchairs and bathing boats in garish colors. As soon as I left the village and the fishing boats, I lost my temper. Spiaggia! A Potemkin backdrop against the open sea.

I returned to the pier. A bird hung somewhere in the air and squawked shrilly and tremblingly. Strangely enough, the sound had a calming effect on me, the beach had seemed so deserted.

The sun peeked out for a while, the sea shone emerald green and transparent. Far out at sea, some brown-red spots pulsed. A large crowd of small children suddenly came marching down towards the beach.

There were girls in bright red playsuits and boys in gray, apparently about six or seven years old. They were trudging back and forth in the shore, boys and girls separately, led by priests and nuns. The priests were dressed in fluttering effeminate black and the nuns in long and feminine white. They managed to maintain a rough discipline. The children trudged back and forth for a good while, but they neither marched nor ran, they simply strolled in the sunshine below the balcony-adorned house of the summer camp. The girls shivered a little and seemed subdued, but the boys pushed each other and left their place in the line to throw sand at each other. They were strong boys with strong legs.

I stood on the pier and looked for sails. They came closer and closer, bobbing and swaying towards land like cheerfully colored butterflies.

On the outside of the pier are large boulders. One of the boulders has ended up a bit away from the others. And then a photographer arrives. He places the camera on a tripod. The little girls are to be photographed. One of the nuns has halted his troop and is sending one after the other of his bambine forward to pose for the signor and his apparato fotografico. He waves his hands and shouts out instructions. “Go to the rock... no, approaching... lean against it. Okay. And now you will turn this way... and laugh... Ecco!... Next...” The girls shiver and twist - the wind is cold. But when their turn comes they throw off their

thin sweaters and literally fly away to the rock, laughing with delight. The girls are cute and seem to be relatively healthy. Most of them are big city children, but the nervous tension and lack of sun are no longer noticeable in them, they seem free.

"Ecco! And then the next." A photo to send home. A souvenir from the sea. Something for father and mother - their figlia on the rocky coast of the Adriatic at Cesenatico.

Why not? Is the coast less dramatic just because there is only one rock? Would it be better for the children and parents if it were different, if the photographs were taken against varied backgrounds, if they were unique? The only thing that matters is the moment itself, or the memory of that moment. Love that lasts is the only thing that matters.

The priest and the nun are aware of this. Many others are aware of this. But sometimes love alone seems quite inadequate.

These children are raised by the church. They are taught love and obedience as their parents were once taught. And their parents' parents. In due course they come to believe that life is an inevitable tragedy, they come to believe that the goal of life lies beyond death and that everything down here is pure vanity. And gradually they learn to accept their share of the injustices.

There are new children, new photographers. But the rock remains...

The sky had cleared now, the wind picked up. And the boats sailed-homeward. They flew towards the coast on bright wings, they rose and fell and stamped in the swell.

And now the first fishing cutter is heading through the channel. The mainsail is a dark orange triangle with lemon yellow spots at the top, a gray-white strip shines at the bottom. The boat itself is gray with a deep blue streak. Now it sinks into the last long wave trough and slides into the calm water of the harbor channel. One man sits huddled at the tiller, another stands upright at the mast with his hand on the halyard. The cutter grinds in and turns sharply. The sail flaps and collapses, a sunlight-filled wing that bags.

More boats arrive. A large trawler roars across the sailing fleet, the engine thumps steadily thud-thud. The crewmen rest on the deck next

to the stowed trawl. One sits and eats with a pot under his arm. He fishes out a lump of spaghetti, throws it into his mouth and waves at me with his fork. A rough and tanned and hairy man. I can hear him laughing as the trawler thumps past.

In the harbour, work is in full swing. The sails are being covered, the net is being hung out to dry, the ropes are being coiled, the decks are being scrubbed and the fish boxes are being emptied of water. A crewman sorts the day's catch. Crayfish, sole, shrimp and small squid. He sorts them on the deck. The fisherman is dressed in a threadbare khaki shirt with half-short sleeves. On his feet are strange, massively shapeless rubber boots. They are homemade from the inner tubes of car tires. He divides up his catch, his fingers running quickly among the strange sea creatures. He has almost emptied a box of squid. They remind me of the rare antique glass objects in the S. Vitale Museum in Ravenna - pale white-blue bubbles with two dark eyes. But the squids are soft and limp like gelatin, with many limp arms - or legs. He throws them into the box and the thin gold ring glints on his finger.

Now all that remains on the deck are the remains of fish, small fish, small crayfish, silvery splashes. But how carefully he gathers the remains and puts them aside! In fact, the catch is small - a small box of squid, another containing lobsters, a few soles and such small crayfish of course.

Another boat comes alongside and moors next to the first. The people on board pay no attention to their comrades, they work in silence or exchange a few short remarks in the brusque manner that distinguishes those who have learned to speak concisely in work, comradeship and danger. They shout at friends who pass by, smile quickly and get back to work. An atmosphere of deep seriousness rests on the fishermen as they sort and rinse and pack their catch, they seem almost gloomy. But their faces brighten and up on the quay they talk animatedly and laugh freely.

A large crowd of spectators has mixed with the fishermen. They are mostly elderly men, massive as rocks, covered in shells. They wear funny knitted caps on their heads and smoke chalk pipes with long, thin

shafts. Boys on bicycles, little barefoot girls with fishing rods, broad-hipped women carrying baskets, ruddy-cheeked young girls with shiny hair - all gather on the quay as the boats come in.

The buyers' weighhouse is a tall brick building with a facade plastered with disfiguring posters. People step aside to let the men carrying in boxes of fish pass. Inside it is cool, damp and cramped. In the middle of the floor are the scales surrounded by stacked crates, and there the buyers sit on benches. On a special bench directly in front of me are the inspectors. And now a box of lobsters is placed on the scales.

"Seicento!" the voices roar in chorus.

"Seicentodieci!" It was a single sharp voice.

The faces of the spectators are lined and eager and serious. They are simple people from the towns and villages in the neighborhood. In the inspectors' bench you can see completely different types - a gray-haired man with a bold aristocratic profile, a young lady dressed in black, stylish, not rustic like the others. The high bid is recorded and the weighing continues without interruption. The tension rises sharply towards a climax, rapid screams, faces full of anxiety and defiance, interest at full throttle... The spectators push themselves closer and devour the fish with their eyes and make excited judgments. They are all violently interested, it concerns them personally, even if they are neither buying nor selling. And they are full of passion, they react like powder kegs.

The sun sinks towards the roofs, the last boats glide in. Several nets have already been laid out on the pier and others are hung between the masts. The fishing boats are rarely new and the gear is not from yesterday either. Although the boats are small - about ten meters long - they often use a schooner rig, a high mast amidships and a short mast forward. From one of the foremasts a net hangs in a heavy arc down to the quay where a young man has wrapped the end around his bare bronze-colored shoulder and narrow waist. He is straight and robust as he leans back against the weight like a living tent pole. His beautiful head is hard, his Roman features are as if carved in marble. His upper body is naked, his loins lean and supple in greased, torn trousers. He is barefoot. With his sinewy arm around the thick flap of net he stands

there, taking the spars while his companion on board fixes the rope. The masts cast long shadows over the quayside, but the young fisherman's body gleams in the evening sun, burning like polished copper. He is a god of the sea, dressed in his brown tarry net. And this is what land and sea and generations of toil and toil have produced! A man in his own element, in tune with his daily work, a man who takes life by storm!

During the day, the harbor and the village rest in sunny halftones and the boats are no exception. They are bleached by the sun and leached by seawater, subdued. The glow of color does not last longer than sunset. Then it goes out. The colors seem to flow into each other, turning into varying degrees of shadow. After sunset, everything is peaceful, the villagers are having dinner, the shops are closed. And the air flows motionless, the breeze has retreated over the sea and is visible far out like a dark blue ribbon. Small fires are burning on the quay. They suddenly flare up in flickering red and orange. A man from a trawler throws a handful of sticks onto the quay. He strikes a match, the wood sparkles and crackles merrily. For a moment the fisherman holds his fleshy hands over the fire and interrupts his enjoyment only to scratch himself where it is most needed. His patched trousers hang together around a single button. When the fire has died down to a pile of blue-red flames, he places an iron grate on the pile and flattens it. On the deck of the trawler lie a few small squids, a dozen or so. He lines them up on the grate and immediately they begin to hiss and collapse in violent convulsions as if they were still alive. When they begin to smoke, he turns them over. The cabin door opens, a black-musked face looks out, and the men have a short conversation. The man on deck contemplates the sporting octopuses and pushes his dirty stubble with an equally dirty fist. Then he takes the grate and carries it smoking into the cabin. One by one the fires sink into the ashes, forming black spots on the gray quay.

The room I rented was upstairs in a house on one of the nameless alleys that branch off from the harbor street. The house was of the usual type, cracked plaster and rough-hewn woodwork and hideous

wallpaper. The room had a window over the alley and a small kitchenette, more like a scrub with a small skylight and a kitchen stove and a damp-dripping cement sink. On warm days the scrub rested in the cool twilight, on cold days it was cold and dark. But the room was quite pleasant.

The landlady was of the rough, sturdy, primitive sort with whom I got along so well. A plump, nimble brunette, strong and healthy, with a golden-brown complexion and radiant agate eyes that sparkled with mischief. Her face was lined as befitted a middle-aged woman. She was cheerful and generous by nature. Of course I would use la cucina. I could put my spirit burner atop the stove and cook spaghetti. "Or brodo. Do you know how to cook a good brodo?" She taught me how to boil the meat for several hours with a bunch of spices whose names I could not possibly remember. "And the meat - do you know what cuts you buy? No? Look here now..." And she patted her plump hips. "This is the steak. And if you want to fry..." Her hand continued to vividly illustrate her words. She was completely uninhibited, but thank goodness I managed to control my glee.

"I'm a good cook, that's me. For three years I cooked for Il Duce, for Mussolini. That's right. I lived in his house, in Rome. I cooked for him and his family." She mused. "He was a good husband. But then they took him away, and shot him... tatata." And her hand eagerly showed how it was done. "That's life. Today red, tomorrow dead."

"And you mourn him?"

"When he died? Sure. And there were others who mourned too. But of course many didn't. That's life. When I left Il Duce's service, he gave me a nice bonus, a large sum of money. He liked my cooking..."

My landlady lived on the same floor, above a wine hut. She had a lot to do and did it in good spirits, moving about on light feet, and grunting over the broom and the dustpan. She was curious but nevertheless tactful in her sincere and unreflective way. When she messed around in the kitchenette she usually had a valid reason.

"Sir, forgive me," she said, tiptoeing through the room. "I have some bottles under the sink here, look. Tomatoes, canned tomatoes.

I put them in myself..." She looked at the bottle caps with suspicion. "You have to be very careful, the chemicals are strong. Sometimes they explode, the bottles that is. Last year a whole liter exploded, here in the kitchen, thump thump! The whole ceiling full of tomatoes!" She laughed and the laughter lit up her open humorous face. She leaned on the broom handle. "Are you married, do you have a wife and children? No? Well, you're young. But don't you get tired from cycling? How does it affect your love life?" she asked jokingly in her strong, slightly veiled voice. "How old do you think I am?"

"Forty-three, at most -"

"Fifty-three -"

"Amazing. You'd never believe it!" And you did.

"I've always been healthy. In Italian we say buon essere. Sono di buon essere, io. I've always liked to dance. And sing. But mostly about dancing, ballare, ballare." She grabbed the broom and waltzed around with it, and the color rose to her cheeks. "Do you believe in fate, signore?"

"If you mean chance..."

"No, I'm talking about fate. About life as it is," she said calmly.

"I believe in Fate. When I was young, I didn't want to get married, just dance and sing. But then fate intervened - il fato. I was forty when I met a man I married. How long do you think we had known each other before the wedding? - A month!" She laughed triumphantly. "Not more than a month - and then we got married. I never thought it would happen. And yet I did. I was forty years old then. We met in Rome while I was working for Il Duce. It was fate."

"And what does your husband do?"

"He is a bricklayer, he builds walls like this one," and she patted the gray plaster.

"So he is a bricklayer."

"A bricklayer," she mimicked, and returned laughing to her household chores.

She had lived and danced and believed in the power of fate. And fate had done its work. If she felt her childlessness was a flaw, at least it

did not show on her. She had been active all her days, the peasant girl who did her work in a world of transient importance and who was now a housewife in her own home. She had learned to understand the value of money. In the summers she rented rooms to the bathers, the viaggiatori. "During the season they even lie on the floor in the stairwell." She had fought for her independence and partly achieved it, but she had never allowed it to interfere with her ability to enjoy the tangible joys of life. She was down-to-earth, primitively convinced that life is simple. And that made her contagiously cheerful and full of courage. In her own way she was an unusually true and warm and lively person. Her broad face shone with love of life.

"Everything is interesting, don't you think? At least that's how it feels to me. You make sketches when you travel, don't you?" And she imitated a cartoonist on the cracked oilcloth of the dining table. "The drawings are important. There are things that you can't express in words, people don't always understand. And then you draw pictures and make illustrations... That way you can express what you think more easily... And you can get paid more for your articles, the newspapers pay more for illustrated stories," she added confidentially.

The weather became autumnal, the stone floors and plastered walls inside radiated a raw chill.

"This is the worst time," said my landlady. "The winter is colder, but you don't notice it - you're used to it, see. You should stay here over the winter, signore."

I didn't want to make any promises. "It must be quite gloomy when the winter rains come," I replied. "Does it rain a lot here on the coast?"

"Yes, to some extent. But what can you ask for? Even in northern Italy we have plenty of sunshine. Spring, summer and autumn the sun shines - il sole. And if it happens to be cloudy for a few days now and then, well... " She shrugged her shoulders with a smile. "It's like everything else in life - you have to know what clouds are to really appreciate the sun."

I spent whole days in the fishing port. How real everything was, how beautiful and how far from all pretense! The lack of beauty of the

environment alone gave life added meaning here. Nature had not been generous in these parts. No green decorative mountains fell steeply down to wildly beautiful rocky beaches and a deep blue ocean. The mediocre land slope met an even more mediocre sea and a poor village was in the middle.

Where I sat on the quayside, I often became completely absorbed in the contemplation of some detail - for example, how a mast was braced with maidens and seijsings on the mittens or how a sail was shaped or sewn and matched. Sometimes I watched a crewman work and was seized with admiration for the nonchalant purposefulness of movements that could seem very awkward.

And I said to myself: It's because of the work, it comes from nature and their labor. They fight against wind and waves. The work shapes a man. And where the connection between man and work is natural, harmony emerges... Even if man actively fights against nature - perhaps most of all when he fights - he possesses inner harmony. He may be denied external freedom. But not harmony, not the fundamental agreement between soul and body which is the prerequisite of wholeness. As long as man accepts within himself the meaning and direction which the elements give to his life, he is a harmonious whole.

This is how life can appear when people live and fight at the mercy of the elements. Its mere artlessness is an intrinsic value. In Italy one encounters this authenticity among farmers and fishermen, one feels that the struggle for daily bread is reduced to its simplest components. The people are primitive, the tools are clumsy, the environment is original. One almost wishes they would never change. One enjoys their rough forms, their flea-hunting, their unbuttoned trousers, their way of scooping food from a sooty pot, the beauty and strength of their movements. And as on bread - the intuitive wisdom of the people and the songs. None of this is artificial - however rough it may seem, it expresses pride and integrity, people manage to be themselves enough. And that is something that most of us cannot do, we lack the wholeness that dependence on nature can give. The workers of the sea and the earth are whole. In their hearts and souls they accept not only the necessity of

the struggle for life but also the living embodiment of work.

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A boy sitting on the quay and looking down at a rough-limbed man with curly hair who was working in his fishing boat turned to me and said: "That's my friend - we fish together - now and then."

"Why only now and then?"

"Because there are quite a few fish, you deserve more in a small boat if you go out alone." The boy was hollow-cheeked and nervous and flapped his hands as he spoke and beat a drum roll on the quayside with his shoes turned down. His name was Pietro. He saw me taking notes and asked:

"Have you heard of Moretti?"

"No," I said.

"Marino Moretti. A famous writer. He was from here. He wrote about the people and life in the village." Pietro spoke, rattling like a machine gun. The tense, almost gloomy expression of his hollow-eyed face did not change. The muscles in his face twitched. And he continued proudly: "The port was designed by Leonardo da Vinci. The great Leonardo da Vinci himself drew up the plans according to which this canal was built..." Pietro's khaki trousers were torn. Even when the sun was shining, he wore a blue woolen sweater. It was also torn. In the open collar, a small silver cross dangled over a triangle of hairy skin.

"Would you like to go fishing?" he asked suddenly.

"Thank you," I said.

Pietro exchanged a few words with the comrade he called Mario.

"You can come with me," he told me. "Not tomorrow - it's Sunday - but the next day. Come here at three in the morning."

I set my alarm clock for half past two - unnecessarily, since I woke up much earlier from sheer excitement. I made coffee and put bread and cheese in my coat pocket as I left.

It was still dark outside. A few men were trudging down the alley towards the harbor and the throbbing engines. A few pale stars shone in the sky. Several boats had already set sail. Others were coasting at half speed through the canal. The forest of masts with gaff rigs and jibs swung high into the air and the sails, black around them, gliding shadowily across the eastern half of the sky out towards the sea and the dawn.

Mario's barca was small. It vibrated from bow to stern from the uneven thud of a motor hood behind the mast. With Mario at the helm, Pietro slumped next to the engine, and me sitting on the bow, we rattled down towards the gangway. There was no wind, the sea pulsed as if under a film of oil, rushing black-blue and black past and shining in paler blue far ahead in the first light of dawn.

The boats spread out, but not out of sight, and the thud of the engines met from all directions and mixed in the air that was warm and first smelled of land and then water and sea breeze. Mario whirred the helm so that his barca kept its course straight out to sea and Pietro came to help prepare the net. It was starting to get light but the sun had not yet risen from the gray haze of a distant fog bank. Astern, the mainland sank like a narrow dark strip.

I wanted to help Mario and Pietro with the fishing and be of use. They ignored me, worked silently and intently, and I felt that I was mostly in the way. Mario had - with hesitation - let me come aboard. And it was Mario's boat. So it would be good if I could show him and Pietro what I could do. But I didn't really know what to do in his boat. Nevertheless, I managed to give him a hand when the net went into the water. Mario saw me tie the towline to a bait in the stern with a knot that held and was easy to untie and he smiled to himself.

Before sunrise we made two attempts with the net, just below the surface of the water. We let the boat drift and the net sink a little, then pulled it in a tangled arc towards the boat. Since the meshes were fine, I expected to see all kinds of fish in the net. But with the exception of a few small squid and torn seaweed strips, it was empty. In any case, we managed to fill almost two boxes with squid.

The sun cut brightly through the fog at the edge of the view and climbed quickly into the clear sky. A cold breeze began to blow towards the land. We made a few more sweeps, this time letting the net sink deep. The water was blue-green and microscopic particles that looked like dust grains glittered in the sunlight refracted beneath the surface. "We are on the outside of a reef, working our way inward. "There should be fish here," I said to myself. And I remembered how I had fished for salmon in a bay in the Pacific Ocean near my home. There is an underwater reef there that stretches from the lighthouse to the abandoned jetty. The water is shallow with an unexpected depth and the tide creates strange currents. The salmon liked to stay in the eddies along the reef. You could fool them if the tide rose as usual and you knew where to throw your piece of herring...

But we didn't catch any salmon here. Here at Adria's most approximate coastal reef, the net yielded a few skinny soles and stiff crayfish. The crayfish's armored back is sandy, with two dark rings that look like eyes at one end. On the underside, it resembles a large beetle with countless crawling legs that continue to tread water even when it has only air to move in.

I watched Mario at work. Mario was a large and strong. He had a fair forehead, bold clean features and beautiful curly hair. His calm grey eyes had a far-seeing look. Mario walked barefoot, dressed in overalls and a khaki shirt with sleeves to the elbows. The shirt was of the same fabric as Pietro's trousers, as if Pietro and Mario had shared an old uniform. But the two men were of completely different kinds. Pietro was nervous and conscious of his movements, efficient in his work - but only outwardly. It seemed as if he wanted to overcome an inner confusion by taking action, and was uncertain even when he acted.

Mario was his opposite, resolute, intimately connected with the sea, the boat and work. Mario was born a fisherman, a pescatore. He worked seemingly instinctively, surely and quickly. And he knew exactly what he wanted - to earn his living at sea in his own boat. He trusted himself. He mastered the reality of the present and the work - what was beyond that did not concern him. something in the past had affected

Marios now I already knew. Pietro had told me that during the war the Germans had seized Marios and the other fishermen's boats. Then his wife and parents fled to the mountains but Mario joined the partisans who were fighting on the Po. After the war he continued with the life that was his only reality.

One day when Mario returned from a fishing trip I saw a little boy waiting on the quay. Mario let him come aboard and joyfully explore the mysteries of the boat. The little son was part of Mario's reality.

Simple and full of strength he stood there with his fists in the net. His muscles trembled like taut ropes on his bare forearms. The water splashed over his arms and legs as he arranged the salvaged net on the deck after each jerk. And he pulled and pulled.

The wind picked up. Now the fog bank was just thin smoke hanging down from the garlands of woolly white clouds. In Mario's boat we hoisted sails like everyone else and headed towards land. Far in the distance the coastlay like a sandy yellow and green-speckled ribbon, and beyond it the purple hills stretched southwards. The land and the mountains and the sea were powdered with sunlight, as if they had been molded and shaped by the sun and left to lie in the glowing dust from the forge.

Mario's boat was single-masted and carried a foresail. The boom was not attached to the mast but extended past it and hung from a block that was attached to its front. The foresail, which also extended past the mast, had a steep slope and pulled the sail out in an uneven triangle. On the sun-bleached brownish-yellow canvas someone had sewn a guitar of bright orange fabric - a silent accompaniment to one's thoughts. The boat was ruffled fore and aft and the large space amidships was occupied only by two tows and the engine in its box. A long oar was lashed to one rail and there were fish boxes and wicker baskets and rusty fuel cans. Through a broken plank in the floor, the ballast of cement blocks green with moss was visible. And under the roof of the stern, there were rags and old sacks like in a doghouse.

I sat with Pietro next to the silent engine. The boat rose and fell, and rolled and stamped in the waves, strange, imaginative sounds were

heard from the old planking, the leather collar of the boom rubbed against the mast, the rudder creaked in its iron corset, the water snorted around the blunt bow and slipped whisperingly over the stern.

I listened and watched the sail that resembled a light cloud, and glanced at Pietro who was sitting next to me. His temples were finely modeled over high cheekbones. His brown eyes shone pale as wet stones. "Like the marble shard I found on the beach yesterday," I thought. Polished by sand and waves, wet and shiny, but without their own light. Pietro's eyes were wide open and honest, searching - but not far-sighted. And he was constantly twisting and turning, nervously moving his sinewy hands and feet in heavy, clumsy boots as if he wanted to be somewhere else. He seemed unwell, as if he didn't trust himself.

"A good catch," I said, nodding towards the boxes.

"Not bad," Pietro replied. "But it doesn't happen every day. And when there's a storm and..."

"Do you like fishing?"

"Oh, yeah..."

He said "oh, yeah," I thought, without conviction. And on the dock he started asking me questions. About America, France, Sweden, about how people were doing abroad. And then he said he was going to leave. "To some other part of Italy?" I asked. "Maybe," he replied. "But life is difficult in Italy..." I took it that his "leaving" meant an even longer journey. "Yes, but where are you going and what are you going to do?" he asked, doubt mixed with fear in his voice. "Why not to the United States or South America. Lots of Italians have gone there," I said. "Yes... yes," he muttered, discouraged. "Many do. But I only know Italy..." And for the first time during our conversation he became excited. "Something must happen, there must be a change here... There must be work for all Italians... something... new..."

Now he says "oh well" and looks towards land. "He is no safer there than at sea," I tell myself. "Here he is dissatisfied and there he is disappointed. You notice that life is changing, Pietro, and you yourself want to be different, you long for a different way of life, a different goal in

life - 'something new'. But you have no self-confidence. The determination within you does not exist as power but as anxiety, as resistance to the aimless. You wanted to achieve the new way of life even if it meant suffering for yourself."

Pietro surveyed the boat with a sad expression. "There are no such puny little boats in America or Sweden, are there?" he wondered.

"Oh, there are probably..."

Pietro didn't seem to hear. "The new boats have to be big and modern," he said. "You can't fix anything in a small boat. The best thing a fisherman can do is become a partner in a big boat and go far out to sea for tuna and..."; he turned to Mario, who was sitting bent over the tiller with both feet propped up on the rough beams. "Tell me, Mario, when are you going to sell your boat?"

"Non ancora," Marie replied. Her calm eyes looked steadily away towards the coast. "Non ancora - not yet," he repeated as if to himself.

"But Marie earns a decent living, doesn't she?"

"Yes, since he usually fishes alone," Pietro replied, and there was a hint of reproach - or envy - in his words.

The fishing boats converged on the harbor entrance. The red mark on the pier could have been a racing buoy. And when I saw the other sails chasing us home, I felt like I did when I was a boy, building boats and racing them. But this was no competition, just a picturesque rush home after the day's work.

We moored below the square and carried the catch ashore and tidied up the boat, pausing to watch the other boats come in. Mario's eyes were kind when they met mine - we had something in common. But he didn't ask me to join him on another fishing trip. And I didn't want to ask him to...

I thought of my two friends Mario and Pietro, one content with his reality, the other torn by uncertainty. Neither felt confident about the future. And yet - perhaps Pietro's anxiety would one day give rise to something more real than Mario's reality?

The evening is sinking in, warm and still. The night is also warm, but full of unease, as if it were troubled by its own stillness. I doze off. And

then a sound seeps into my sleep and I lie half-awake and listen. In the alley below my window, some singing fishermen are clattering along. They are trying to keep up with the simple rhythm of the song. They manage to keep up the tempo, but their legs are reluctant to fall behind. I go numb again and vaguely imagine that they are staggering as they walk.

A pause - and then a lone male voice is heard somewhere in the warm night. The voice is clear and shrill, it cuts through the darkness. I fail to make out the words, but I am captivated and fascinated by his song. It has no accompaniment, the wild, half-howling and drunken voice alone fills the entire neighborhood, dies away and returns without tiring. The singer in the darkness is a shadowy figure, but the song never gives up, the words and the melody well up strong from the soul of Italy.

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I followed the coastal road. It ran from villages and seaside resorts to seaside resorts and cities. There were very few fields and untouched sandy beaches. "La Riviera Adriatica" in all its commercialized monotony was inescapable and impossible to avoid. The villas and hotels were, as usual, in an endless row, neat but without dignity. Even the private houses lacked dignity; they were indiscreet and tasteless. They clung to the plague and put up signs saying "Pensione" and "Alloggio". It was more profitable to let others live in your house and call it "Pensione" than to live there yourself and call it home.

In Rimini I got lost and asked another cyclist for directions. "I'll help you, come with me", he said. We cycled along gravel streets past many war-scarred houses. "Bombs and shells", explained my companion. "There was a major landing operation here, the biggest since Anzio. The town was mostly destroyed, but several blocks have been rebuilt." He was ugly and muscular, with a fleshy, ruddy face. We turned onto a

busy street and he pointed to a Roman triumphal arch. "The Arch of Augustus," he said with joyless pride, "it is the largest in Italy, second only to the one in Rome. Allora, that's where you should take off - and I'll take off here..." He pointed in the direction and waved goodbye: "Arrivederci..."

The Italians' attitude towards their country is marked by a certain pathos. They glorify the art and history left on Italian soil. They are intensely attached to the reminders of the centuries when Italy was powerful, honored and admired throughout the world. They revere the past more than the present; that is the tragedy of the Italians. It prevents them from breaking with the past, which would allow them to live completely in the present.

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The landscape began to become less monotonous. The Apennines had moved closer and shone purple in the hazy light that made all distances so deceptive. The mountains stretched out small hills and hilly spurs towards the sea.

Between these hills lay Cattolica. The slopes around the city were green or hay-colored and extremely well-kept. On one of the hills stood a magnificent castle, which was visited every summer by la contessa di Roma, if a peasant was to be believed. Cattolica was waiting for the next tourist season. It was a wait without tension; the tourists came as surely as summer itself. The hotel and boarding-house keepers were most reluctant to take the solitary traveller under their roof; he hardly looked rich. But the Germans who spent their holidays there were still numerous and impressive enough to get what they wanted.

"They have money," explained the padrona of my hotel. "But," she added with a grimace, "they are not nice, none sono buon, in tedesce. They are always so demanding. During the war they made off with everything we had."

When she learned that I was American, she became more friendly. "I have had many American and English guests at my hotel," she said. The hotel showed no signs of having been damaged during the war. "But then it was a hospital. The American and English officers who lived here called me mother. They invited me to dinner in this dining room. They were decent - not at all like the Germans." The padrona confirmed my view that Italians' opinions of foreigners were often the result of their personal experience. In another town I visited, someone claimed that the Germans were a pain but the Greeks seven times worse. It was the Greeks, not the Anglo-Americans or the Germans, who had fired cannons or bombed or looted that particular town and the speaker's own house. "The shirt is closest to the body," as the saying goes.

Fano was one of those towns that seemed to have outlived itself. There, people huddled together as best they could, ignoring their surroundings. They were paralyzed and resentful of the gluttony of fate.

I looked for an undisturbed corner where I could read and write and asked a police constable for directions to the nearest library.

"There is only one, next to the church," he said.

The staircase in the library building was made of marble. Fragments of cornices, inscriptions and reliefs were built into the wall. The air seemed wonderfully cool inside and the silence - complete. Two steps up in all the marble, a door stood wide open in a corridor. A shrivelled woman dressed in black grinned out and said something about "Libraria chiuso". When I stopped, she pointed to the landing above - and closed the door.

I went up another flight of stairs and found a new corridor with several closed doors. Voices could be heard behind one of the doors. I knocked, the door opened and a gray-haired gentleman stuck his head out. "Che vuole?" he asked grumpily. With his glasses and white collar, he reminded me of a professor who gets an irrelevant question from a student. "The library is closed today," he said. "Is there anything in particular you want - would you like to visit the archives?"

"No", I said, "just reading and writing . . Isn't this the city library?"

"Yes. But it's closed today. Come back tomorrow, in the afternoon."

It was probably the heat that had irritated me. "Tomorrow", I replied sourly. "But what if you happen to want to read today? Where in this town can you work just as well as in the library?"

"Where? In a café - anywhere", the man replied.

I persisted. "Are there no other libraries in Fano?"

"Yes, the church has ... "

"No, I mean a library where you can borrow ordinary literature..."

"Home loans are not granted. People are allowed to come here when the library is open and read what is here. And today the library is closed - chiuso." He took a step back, I caught a glimpse of old polished wood, a green carpet, walls covered with books. And then the door closed.

I went down the stairs. This was Fano's only public library - a laudable purpose in poor execution... And how estranged from it the people who, at that very moment, were were working or resting or wandering about in the streets! There are many towns and villages that have no public libraries and where one can get only the literature that the Catholic Church has deliberately selected. I was reminded once again of the gap between the Italian masses and the educated Italians who have been entrusted with the leadership and spiritual care of the masses. It is no coincidence that ordinary books are very expensive in this country - especially for Italians.

At dusk people poured out into the streets and strolled back and forth past the lighted windows and shops and fruit stands and bars. Here you could see it again - everything was in between, neither primitive nor healthy and vibrant new, just something meaningless and half-baked. Poverty and disappointment are everywhere in Italy. Sometimes they hit you with sudden force, become downright painful. They can feel like a constant, terrifying presence in the air you breathe.

Evening. And a trattoria. A semi-dark crawl space between low beams and cold stone floors and almost no guests. At one of the tables, a bald man in his shirt sleeves sits in front of a glass of beer and nods to the music from the radio in the deserted bar. Another waits for his dinner, which he has just ordered from the high-breasted waitress.

Five cocky officers enter and sit down at the long table near the

door. One of the five, a stocky person with black hair and a curvaceous figure, orders Marsala - three bottles. They drink. The man waiting for his dinner watches them with sharp, intelligent eyes. He looks good. The shadow of a sardonic smile plays around the corners of his mouth as he watches the five drinking SOLDA TI.

The scoundrel wants to pay - for everything, he emphasizes loudly.

"Stay and have dinner," someone calls from the kitchen.

"No. Some other time, we're in a hurry today..." The officers break up and strut their way.

The high-breasted waitress brings in the soup. She resembles a precocious peasant girl. Her face is that of a young girl - but she has the fully mature body of a woman. The man who looks good is quite young. He jokes familiarly with the waitress and she laughs and rushes out into the kitchen.

After the soup, meat is served with tomato salad. The bald man is alone eating spaghetti AL BURRO. The young hostess of the trattoria enters with a little boy. She leads him lightly by the hand so that his body weight rests on his chubby legs. The boy is very small, no more than a year old, but he can walk - about like a duck. The mother is talking to the young man named Lando. He pats the boy under the chin and smiles, "come va?". The smile is kind-hearted.

I've already had lunch at the trattoria and spoken to the woman and her husband, the athletic padrone who is also the chef. Now I say hello to her. Yes, I'm leaving tomorrow, to Perugia.

Lando becomes interested and skillfully joins in the conversation. He was born in Perugia. A nice city, just a little too peaceful for him. "Yes, we have a university," he says, "but no student life in the true sense, nothing that's really fun. I moved from Perugia because I longed for joy and pleasure..."

"Perugia is exactly what I'm looking for," I thought.

"Have you visited Bologna?" Lando continues. "No. There you're supposed to see a famous old university, one of the oldest in Europe. And Naples? Oh Naples...", he sighs. Lando has pulled his chair up to my table and ordered a bottle of Marsala. "Anyway, Rome is the best,"

he says, draining his glass. "There is power in Rome, signore, real power. I studied there for three years. I took a gymnastics course. The state paid for my studies, the state did something for the youth and the nation at that time. It was under Mussolini. A great era. Then great things were accomplished, really great things. Nowadays..." And he snaps his fingers. "Now nothing is done. Not that much. I work as a truck driver because gymnastics doesn't pay. I manage. But then - then we had great things going on, sports, camping, public works..." Landa becomes thoughtful as he remembers the happy time when his youthful energy was put to a better use.

"Those children's colonies on the coast - were they built in Mussolini's time?" I asked.

"Most of them, yes -."

"But if they're still in use, you should be able to get a job there as a gymnastics teacher."

Lando frowns and shrugs. "They don't need me. The church is in charge of the colonies these days. The emphasis of the teaching - you know what I mean, signore - is not on gymnastics." The smile I had seen earlier in the evening curls Lando's sensitive mouth.

"Doesn't the government have the last word in such matters?"

"The word, yes. But not the practical decision. The government builds children's colonies and helps to keep them running. But it is the church that is in charge. It also runs the schools..." Landa speaks warmly. "You have to be Catholic to go to school in Italy. All of Italy is Catholic, signore. Even the communists," he laughs. "The communists are cunning. They play comedy. They have to do it. You don't quarrel with the church in Italy with impunity. You hold a course that is parallel to the church. La Chiesa rules Italy. That's the truth of the day."

The mother with her little son approaches again. She is gracefully feminine, beautiful in person and has finely drawn features. She wants the signore Americano to see how well her bambino can already sing!

"How old is he?"

"Eleven months."

"Not more! And what is his name?"

"Walter," the mother replies proudly. She pronounces the name in the German manner. The waitress joins us and admires the beautiful child.

"You have plenty of children in Italy," I say.

"Yes," Lando agrees. "Yes. We love children. I already have three."

"And a wife we'll never see," the waitress says sarcastically. Her round face is flushed red and she gives him a mocking glance. He smiles thinly and maliciously, his eyes shining hard, almost meanly as he throws his arm out to grab her. She throws herself aside but stands a little way from him, teasing. He takes Walter's hand and leads him in a semicircle around the chair.

I ask clumsily: "Is it true what people say that your biggest problem is overpopulation - that you have too many children?"

"Many children will become many workers in the future," Lando protests.

"In what industry?" I can't stop the question.

Lando becomes thoughtful. "Yes, I understand what you mean. But it's the government's fault. It only deals with politics instead of governing the country." He caresses the boy. "We Italians love children. And it is natural for people to bring children into the world, not just because religion teaches us to do so. And if people wish - or must - they can let the church take care of the children. But they rarely do that..."

The bald man has ordered another beer. He fails to listen to the music and our conversation at the same time.

"There are many old buildings in Fano," I say. "Are they of Roman origin?"

"Yes, and from later eras," Lando replied. "And churches", he laughs, "churches everywhere. All of Italy is a church exhibition. The history of our country can be read in the churches, signore". He drinks.

"Are the Catholics very powerful? You just said -"

"That the Church rules Italy?" Lando nods. "As they say. It works in the silence. But it doesn't rule the country well. It doesn't. The Church allows too many shady deals. It meddles too much in politics. It deals too often..." He rubs his fingertips together. "Money transactions. And

it's constantly collecting funds, it's collecting in every nook and cranny of Italy, and scraping together big bucks. Which are being misused. For example, we have too many priests in this country - troppo di preti. And that's really not good, it costs a lot of money." He drinks again.

"And one more thing. We don't have enough industries. Italian industry is small and in the hands of individual capitalists. It does not produce for the good of the country and the people, but for a small few..." Landa speaks slowly and thoughtfully. He rejects the bald man's stare with a sharp look and leans forward across the tables and observes me with tense attention.

"Didn't you have the same capitalists under Mussolini?" I ask.

Landa frowns. "Yes, in a way. But then they collaborated with the state and helped the nation. Now they just put the money in their own pockets or send the profits abroad."

"They helped the nation, if you like," I say. "Let alone because they invested capital in their own country, but they did so because the dictatorship guaranteed them fat dividends, right? And didn't the government push the country into expansion and war to fulfill its tangled commitments and give the people some relaxation from despotism?"

Lando stands on a stool. "Italy was better off then, regardless of who paid for the prosperity. And why shouldn't Italy have colonies? Why should the English and the French and the Americans start moralizing about the methods of commercial expansion?"

We're getting nowhere. I'm allowed to change the subject.

"Do the communists openly fight the private entrepreneurs, I mean politically?"

"Of course they do! There are lots of communists in Italy."

"What are they striving for? What is their program?"

"Ah," Lando snorts. "Program? They don't know it themselves. Something like COME RUSSIA - but in Italian of course. It would be a bloody mess. If the communists seize power, the capitalists can say goodbye, every last one of them can say goodbye to that damn lot."

"The church too?"

"Very possible." Lando reflects on the possibility. "Well, I don't

think it's going to happen that way," he says. "The communists cannot win because they are not organized. They boast of their strength. But they are not really organized. No one in Italy is organized today..." And he adds dryly: "Except the church."

He looks at me steadily. A new light has lit up in his eyes.

"I am a fascist," he says. "I was a fascist - sono fascist. I have been and am a fascist. Italy was strong under fascism. We knew our own worth. What we did, we did for Italy, per l'Italia. But now..." Landa pauses and lights a cigarette. Through the tobacco smoke I can see that the bald man is unable to understand the finale of the Vivaldi concerto.

"Your compatriots often ask if I am German."

"That is because there are many Germans in Italy these days."

"What do the Italians think of them?"

"That they are decent and respectable people," Lando answers with emphasis. "Sono buon i tedesce. We hold them in high regard. They were brave, they fought the war to the end. Not 'come si, come sa' like us Italians. Of course they bombed and pillaged us. But war is war. Now these are different times. We have forgotten all that. It is in our nature to forget. Now we and the Germans are buon camarati again," Lando says with conviction. "The Americans and the English bombed us too, and we have forgotten that -"

That's what YOU are saying, I hear myself thinking.

"We have nothing against the Americans either," Lando smirks. "They are not cocky and intellectually snobbish like the English. The English think they are ... so damn remarkable. The Americans are different, they have no pretensions. They let themselves be spoken to and live like people and mind their own business."

The waitress listens with half an ear to our conversation, leans over the edge of the table and grins wickedly at the excited and slightly stressed Lando.

"What do you think of the French?" I ask. I very carefully sip the Marsala, it is at its sweetest and strongest for me.

"I francesi -", and Lando waves an index finger in the tobacco smoke. "Non sono buon, not good. They are cunning and calculating. They

start wars out of a desire for profit. And they are very powerful - they think so. Arrogant Frenchmen!" he exclaims fiercely. "They are not like us in forgetting things. No, they are more like the Russians. During the war I was in Russia with the Germans. I learned a little of the language, not the grammar - that's impossible - but a few words so I could ask for what I wanted -" He turns to the waitress and blinks, but immediately becomes serious again. "The Russian people resisted us. Well, war is war. But hatred doesn't go away over there. If a Russian were to come to Italy -"

"When then?" I wonder.

"If a Russian were to come here, we Italians would be kind to him, forgive and forget. But the Russian, he doesn't want to forget..." Lando falls silent and looks at me. He is anxious for full attention.

"We and the Germans are good friends again," he nods affirmatively. "Many of us were brothers-in-arms in the war. "Sono buon i tedesce."

An old man comes in from the dark street. He must have been very strong and supple in his younger days. Now his entire body weight is concentrated in his stomach. He resembles a beer keg. His head is small, his eyes sad and blue. His hair that was once blond is now yellowish-white. When I had lunch at the trattoria, he was sitting alone at a table, muttering to himself. It turned out that he was trying to repair the broken chain on his crucifix. He muttered something about saints and poked at the thin silver lock with his thick fingers, and finally staggered out into the kitchen. Now he pulls his trousers up over his round belly and kneels down to us.

"Americano," says Lando, pointing at me.

"So, is that where you come from," says the man, and his English sounds pretty decent. "I've lived in the States, I lived in New York for twenty years, so trust me, I know America." He speaks slowly and whiningly. "I visited Paris once, as an interpreter, and Stockholm, it's the Venice of the North, you see, Stockholm. But in America, I've lived there, in the area of Forty-second Street in New York, in the good old days. There are all sorts of people in America, you experience such contrasts. Americans - it's anyone these days, but the real Americans

were Indians. I certainly know America. I've lived there. We used to buy cigarettes for five cents a pack. Five cents. Five cents was money in those days."

"And now you live in Italy," I interject.

"Oh yes," sighed the stranger. "Here you are. I'll probably die here too. It's hard to get used to life in Italy - different, you see. But that's the way of the world. I earned a lot of money and lost it, I don't complain. I've seen the world - I've seen negroes, there are lots of negroes in America, you see. Some are refined and well-mannered, even educated. You can respect them, just like other people. Ajo, of course there are negroes in the States, there are negroes everywhere, but mostly in the South, you see. I saw negroes in New York. I'll go back to America when I'm young again," and he sighs and smiles painfully, - "when I'm young again - it's a joke, you see..."

"So you want to see Italy," he continues in the same drawling tone. "Then you go south, yes, south along this coast to" - I've forgotten the name of the place - "where there is a church that is very, very interesting - and famous. In that church there are many beautiful objects, artistic objects, including paintings that great men have painted. They are dead now, but they were great, and their paintings are still intact, you can see them in that church. Oh yes. And there is a big bronze door, all made of bronze, you see, and the man who made it was a great artist. It has Christian images. A wonderful door, not so shiny anymore, but the images are still visible. The church is very old and famous. It really is. Most tourists visit it, you should too, I plan to go there myself, one day, as I said was..." He pulls his pants up over his stomach and scratches his ear. "No, I have to go now - good night." He squirms away and disappears into the dark depths of the trattoria.

Lando makes no comment, just taps his forehead with his knuckle and shakes his head.

The radio is silent, the bald guest has left and the waitress is clearing the table. But Lando wants to stay and talk for a while longer.

"What do you do? What kind of work do you have?" he asks.

"At the moment I'm traveling around. I work when I get something

to work on, and try to write a little -"

"So. You're a lucky boy. In Italy we don't have many writers and artists."

"Really?"

"No. Not very many compared to the past. Artistic work can be profitable for a few, for those who have become successful and famous. But not for others. Nowadays people assess life realistically. Young Italians who have studied and worked hard to get an education want it to bring results. And results mean money. Personally, I earn two thousand lire a day, sixty thousand a month. I am a specialist, I drive a truck. Sometimes I work around the clock. Then I have a couple of days off. It's not that crazy. A specialist doesn't have to be unemployed. The reason many Italians can't find work is that they don't have a specialty..."

What you call a specialty, yes, I say to myself and ask: "But Italians can't become a nation of specialists, can they? What are the farmers and the laborers supposed to do then?"

Lando replies hastily. "There's not much to be done about it, the way things are done today... Besides," he adds, "many people are lazy. What can you expect from them as long as we don't have a strong leadership? People don't want to work. Why would they, anyway? The government pays them for not working. Believe me! Five hundred lire a day to beat the drum. Unemployment benefits. If you work you earn maybe a thousand lire a day and if you beat the drum you get five hundred from the state. So you can get by..." Lando falls silent when Walter and his mother reappear. The mother makes one last evening round with the boy.

"A little walk before bedtime?"

"Exactly."

"When do you usually put him to bed?"

"About eleven o'clock."

"But that's unusually late!"

"Not particularly," the mother smiles. "He still falls asleep before eleven." And she adds: "He's always so healthy."

"Italian children are strong and healthy," says Lando.

"They have to be to survive childhood," I say. They laugh heartily.

Lando gets the last word over his smoking cigarette. He is very serious and it seems as if he wanted to convince himself first: "Under Mussolini, all the people in Italy worked. We wanted to work. And we saw the results of our efforts. Many of the things that were done then are customary and are admired today. Everything we did was for the good of Italy - per l'Italia - our own country. Now we are completely meaningless. We are lost between America and Russia. Who will we fight for if we have to go to war again? For America or Russia? It is more likely that we will fight for America, we have more in common with the Americans. Otherwise we will not be respected. And we will not achieve any self-respect. We will not fight for Italy, for ourselves." Lando stares gloomily at the empty bottle. Then he suddenly bursts into laughter and his intelligent face grimaces as if in pain: "Niente buon nel Italia," he says, "come in tutto l'monde - niente buon."

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The train bound for Perugia was overcrowded. It thundered into the station more than half an hour late and stopped so far from the platform that people had to run long distances on the rocky embankment to find a carriage where there was at least standing room. And this happened in third-class carriages in September, when the tourist flow and the worst of the holiday traffic should have been over. What if it wasn't in July or August! We had barely got on the train before the locomotive impatiently whistled "siamo in retardo."

How different it felt to travel by train after the long bicycle ride. The landscape with its villages and gardens, roads and people left only a faint scratch in the memory, a blurred image. And at the same time it was exciting to take in so much in a single glance; the visual impressions that flashed by had a free continuity. A sense of CHANGING WHOLENESS replaced the lack of details.

Between Senigalia and Roccoa Priora the houses lay unevenly spread out in the terrain that was more open and less hilly than before. The coast continued to fall steeply into the sea that surged in deep and emerald green from the blue distance. The strip of shore was granite-colored, narrow and rocky. Fishing boats lay pulled up in the sand here and there in front of the small weathered huts. The boats were heavy and rested heavily, supporting their robust rigging against the sea horizon. The train clattered through a dusty little village and the draft swirled up cyclones of dust in the overcrowded carriage.

Near Ancona the train made a longer stop. The passengers made acquaintance by asking each other questions - was this the train to Roma? Shouldn't it continue all the way to Ancona? Where would one change trains to Masareta? A young sailor in blue pushed his way along the corridor - permesso... permesso. People made way, there was always room for one more. The patience and kindness of the Italians come in handy on trains... Another locomotive approached from behind, bit off a few carriages and dragged them away. The rest of the train started up again and rolled in a wide arc westward toward the mountains.

The sun was drowning in a thickening storm cloud, trees and houses no longer cast shadows. Only the mountains loomed ahead of us in the intangible distance, like a huge thorny barrier, gloomy dark green and gray, streaked with shadow even without the sun. The peasant woman balancing on my valigia was afraid to go past her station. She was going to Fabriano. And she came from Pesaro. Could the signor tell her at what time the train would arrive in Fabriano? Alas, he didn't know- An officer who was sitting reading a magazine glanced at his little gold wristwatch and replied politely - we would pass Fabriano in about an hour. But he wasn't exactly sure - the train was late. He had an alert, rather intelligent face. He was reading an article about the Abyssinian War in a popular weekly.

The train slid into the dark folds of the mountains. Steep cliffs rose up everywhere, gray-black like slate slabs set on edge. And the sky lay heavy like a slate roof. It began to rain, streaks of silver flickered across the window. The dark melancholy of the Apennines was as complete as

possible in the twilight.

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It was late in the evening when I arrived in Perugia. In front of the station, workers hung in black clusters on a trolleybus. The city itself is two kilometers away, up on the mountain.

I tried to find lodgings near the station. In the dirty hotels it invariably went like this: "Si, signore, we have a room - it costs twelve hundred lire..." And with a laugh: "Is that too expensive, signore?"

A worker waiting for the next bus explained the matter in a few words:

"We have a big music festival coming up and the city wants to earn as much as possible from the visitors." Do I look like I'm going to a concert? I wondered sadly.

The city on the hill was radiant with light, full of noise and chatter and people walking. I wandered the side streets, looking for a place to eat. The night was full of bizarre shapes - arches, stairs, towers - all sunk in deepest shadow, floating in a mysterious, promising atmosphere... I came out into a vast piazza where impressive old buildings transformed the pine trees and hedges of the park terrace into miniatures. On three sides the mountain fell steeply into darkness, on the fourth the illuminated arcades of the city center shone. A serene white mass was outlined in the sleeping park. Was this the concert hall? I wondered. And what could they play tonight?

So I was back in the magical maze of alleys where the echo of my steps on the creaky cobblestones bounced strangely in the dark labyrinth of travertine facades. I met people dressed expensively, strolling lazily and not so well-dressed people who were in a hurry. An endless staircase spiraled down into the suggestive darkness. Down the stairs came a group of young girls and boys singing at the top of their lungs. They clicked their eager heels and shouted an inciting, cheerful student

song.

The morning dawned fresh and clear over Perugia's wonderfully smiling diversity. The city had lost none of its magic power. Here were Etruscan walls, museums with Etruscan treasures... I went out to look for a place to live.

Sigriora B. showed me the house even before she knew whether I intended to stay or not. "This is an old house," she rasped in her shrill voice. "But I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world." She led me into a large room with low ceilings and pale green walls hung with portraits in heavy frames. It was crammed with hideous, ornate furniture of the kind that is probably only found in Italy these days. The drawing room resembled a dusty warehouse. The signora rocked over to the fireplace and took a small photograph from the frieze, a portrait. She stared at the photograph in its black frame and sighed: "Il mio marito, mio povero marito - my poor husband. And we who got along so well together!" She was short and stout and dressed in black like a peasant woman. Her long horse-like face was full of bumps and dimples and deep wrinkles and expressed nothing in particular. Her eyes rolled restlessly like shining pearls under her bushy eyebrows. She stared at the photograph and sighed. Just when I thought she was going to burst into tears, she brusquely set it down on the mantelpiece and turned to me. "How much did you pay for the hotel rooms, how much, signore?"

"In small towns and villages about three hundred lire..."

"Poco, poco; troppo poco," the signora grunted, shaking her head. "But how much have you paid here in Perugia, tell me honestly..." she insisted, pressing close to me and placing her gnarled hand on my shoulder. I pulled away. "In Perugia everything is expensive - molto cara."

We stood in silence for a moment. La signora stared out the window at the rolling wooded hills. "Have you visited Assisi, signore? No. Ah, molto bella Assisi. It's not far, only a few minutes by train. Ah, Assisi is delightful with all its churches and monasteries. Saint Francis was from Assisi. Of course you must go to Assisi. Every year there is a procession in Assisi in memory of Saint Francis..." Her deep-set eyes took on an

absent look. Her old face lit up, it almost shone with humble devotion. She sighed audibly.

The next second there was a change in the weather. "Allora," she exclaimed with a shrug, "shall we say three hundred lire on condition that you stay here for at least two weeks?"

The room we had bargained for was across the hall. And since it was neat and homely with whitewashed beams and a red-brown tiled floor, I agreed. I would go to the bank to pay her that evening. "It's Saturday," she panted nervously, "the banks close at one. And it's almost twelve already. And it's starting to rain. Look, you'd better take this one -" She handed me her umbrella and, coughing, pushed me out the door.

A sharp drizzle was pouring down. The distant forests billowed in a greenish haze. I climbed the whimsically winding streets towards the mountain where Perugia's ancient stones shimmered in the rain, brooding over two thousand years of history.

I had begun to unpack when Signora B. burst into the room. How was it? Bene, I said, if I could just change clothes. She didn't listen to that ear, rocked around and made a mess and rattled with empty drawers, opened the window when I wanted it closed and muttered to herself. Finally she made up her mind, walked up to me and held out her hand. "How was it at the bank, signore? Soldi, signore, soldi..." Annoyed, I gave her a week's rent in advance and asked for a receipt. She hurried out, eagerly counting her money.

It was hard to get a hold of her. Actually, she was quite nice. She could joke sometimes. But everything she did and said was so petty. It would have been rude if it hadn't been part of her narrow-mindedness.

She stood fumbling with the lock knob and calling out "signore, signore" until I answered. "The light in the hall is on," she said, pointing accusingly at the corpus delicti. "How long has the light been on?"

"But I'm convinced I turned the light off-"

"Yes, of course you did," she muttered discontentedly, "it could have been the doctor. He forgets sometimes. A nice man, the doctor. He's lived in the room next to yours for more than a year..." She pushed me into a corner and hissed: "What time was it when he came home? Well,

you don't know... I have to remind the doctor about the light. A good man, but forgetful. And electric light is expensive. As for that" - she tugged at my shirt sleeve - "did I show you how to unlock the kitchen door?" She had done so. "And how to lock it?" She had done so too. But she dragged me across the hall, took out a key big enough for a castle gate, and repeated the secret ritual. "You turn it twice to the left - like this - twice. And the light switch - Don't forget, say. Bene, bene. But I have to talk to the doctor, absolutely..." The door lock clicked - once, twice. The light went out.

Something was constantly wrong. But just when my patience had reached its breaking point, something happened that made me feel good again.

To get to the toilet I have to go through the kitchen. Almost every time I found the signora busying herself around the stove, bent over a yellowed match or reading her Bible. If you ignore the poor lighting, la cucina was a really homely place - a stove in the corner, the wooden ceiling with its aged patina, the sturdy chairs and the dining table - they made the kitchen inviting. But there was more. Above the door hung a picture of the Madonna with three white chalices and a bright red bowl with a small eternal flame, on the wall a Christ in a gold frame with the text "Secour di Jesu, confido in Voi" and below this an oval portrait of "il povero marito" - stiff-necked and dignified in a high starched collar and black knee-high boots. And behind the widow fluttered a host of cherubs on a wall calendar...

The signora sat at the dining table in front of an empty plate, a bowl of leftover spaghetti, an apple and a bottle of wine. The incandescent lamp hanging from the massive, oil-shiny ceiling beams cast a dim light over the woman who appeared very old and tired. "Buona sera, signorino," she said, using the diminutive form, and asked if I had already eaten. I said so and made no secret of it. "Perhaps you would still like to have some spaghetti? No? A glass of wine, perhaps?" She smiled sadly. I recognized the photo of her husband on the brooch she wore under her chin. "This wine is good. In Italy, wine is not expensive." She poured me a glass - and indeed, it was good.

"I have intended to travel to Rome to do something, just for one day," I said.

"Roma - molto grande - unica," echoed the signora. "My only sister lives in Rome." And she added imperiously: "You are to take a package to my sister."

It was annoying. But we agreed that I would post the package upon arrival.

The signora took a bite of the green apple. She began to tell me sadly about her husband, who had been a small businessman in the textile business. "He was a good man," she said, "a kind, honest, God-fearing man..."

"When did he die -?"

"Seven years ago, on the twelfth of December. Of pneumonia. He went out one cold day - it was snowing - and caught a bad cold. We could do nothing for him. It was God's will that he should leave me... But now he is happy, because he was a good man," she added emphatically.

I thought of how often she repeated her "povero, povero marito" and wondered if there might not be some doubt about his present happiness. The votive lamp over the door shone palely and steadily on the flowers that would never wither.

My hostess started up. "A little more wine, signorino?" I shook my head. My accumulated resentment and aversion had returned with renewed force.

"In that case, fine, another time. Allora, buona notte," the tired old voice rasped.

When I returned to Perugia on Sunday, she was waiting for me. Her greeting ended with "did you post the package?" I had done more than that. The post office had refused to accept it because it was overweight, with the consequence that the package and I had to travel on one of Rome's oldest trams.

The signora beamed. "You gave the package to my sister personally-"

"No, the lady was not at home. I left the package with the porter."

"So-oh... Did the porter accept it?" Her eyes narrowed. "Aha. And

what did he look like, that porter? Well, quite young, corpulent... yes, yes... Well, then a letter will come one of these days..." She hesitated about how grateful she should be.

She lit a candle and placed it in front of her husband's portrait. "What time is it, signore? Half past eleven. Hm, well..." She fetched the missal and shawl. "Then I'll go to mass..." Had the signora not gone to morning mass as usual? "Of course," she nodded. "But this is a special mass. La Madonna di Napoli is here to bless all the churches. Bella, la madonna," she murmured as if in a trance. And continued in almost the same tone: "Well, my sister wasn't at home... But the doorman probably knows her..."

"It's almost twelve o'clock, signora -"

"Of course. Thank you, thank you." The signora flinched and rushed to the door.

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Umbria is a province with countless churches. And even if the history of Umbria is not entirely hidden in the churches, they contain a great deal. The spiritual power that controls many of these inhabitants is also concentrated there.

Near Perugia's Palazzo Pubblico stands the Cathedral of San Lorenzo. At first it seems almost deserted until in the dim church room you manage to distinguish the faithful and hear what they are singing - Santa Maria - murmur, murmur with the echo like a distant hum. In front of the gilded high altar two shadows in foot-length robes kneel. A young woman enters, dips her fingertips in the holy water bowl on one of the marble columns, kneels, makes the sign of the cross and joins the others. In the dark chapels along the side aisles there is an even more eerie crawl where people sit alone in small caves of distress. A white-haired man - a woman with her hands clasped over her crutch - a hunchback... People begging for help, who are wailing with grief or ex-

ulting with gratitude... Santa Maria - murmur, murmur and echo, while the buses in the piazza outside turn in and stop, wait and start again next to the graceful fountains of marble and mottled bronze. Perugia works and plays.

Another weekday in the same church - in front of the altar a dry-witted, grey-haired priest dressed in white lace, with a Bible full of loose sheets of music in his hand. Around him a crowd of believers, old and young, some very young, crowd around him. The priest speaks freely and uninhibitedly, jokes and underlines his points with lively gestures as he explains the meaning of the word hypocrisy.

On the leather-covered door of the church hangs a notice:

I FIDELI SONO TENUTI A NON LEGGERE (here follows a list of left-wing and anticlerical publications) CHE OFFENDONO I BUONI COSTUMI E DIFFONDONO PRINCIP! CONTRAI ALLA DOTRINA A MAGISTRARO DELLA S. CHIESA.

During my wanderings in Perugia I sometimes visited a church. A few of the churches, like San Lorenzo, were spacious inside despite the gloom under the vaults. But most of them are small and full of old wood, and the warm air is heavy with strange, sharp odors. It felt like a weight on my chest in the constant twilight. The air seemed to tremble with something that was affecting me against my will. Even when the church happened to be empty, I felt the terrible pressure. A mysterious force - something intangible and yet alive. And oppressive. I was uneasy.

But why? I can't help but wonder. What could be so terrifying? Perhaps the pale figures, depicted in martyrdom and death, bleeding to death in the shadows? Or the invisible presence of the faithful in the church room where the mere air has such a fatal effect on them?

I think of Signora B. She had spoken of Saint Francis. But did she really understand his message? For Francis of Assisi, life was based on a universal miracle, a wonder that was by no means terrifying but good in itself. And that is why life was good. There was nothing to be afraid of, nothing to inhibit, nothing to make one a laughingstock in the eyes of the Creator.

Man was free. Francis dared to live boldly and impulsively. He dared

to be extravagantly wasteful because he possessed in excess the inner qualities that made him at once compassionate and insightful, cheerful and stern - and always humble. In our days, humility, on the other hand, is only humiliation and hypocrisy. All these pretended miracles and this empty pomp and the efforts to arouse awe in the people are a deliberate distortion of the message of Christianity. The spiritual leaders abuse humility and gratitude to maintain a social order that does not only serve their spiritual interests. They comfort the people with sermons. But they do not inspire the people and do not make them active and fearless and happy - the priests cannot do that because they prefer to preach about faith and the drama of life instead of being living examples.

Signora B. sits among her saints, among the symbols of old wonders and her own sorrow, polishing wax candles while life flows by...

When I got home, I found a large bowl of appetizing purple grapes in my room. "I guessed you would like them," said the signora. "They were picked in my brother's vineyard. I visited him yesterday. And here is your rent receipt..." She smiled brightly and handed me the note.

"Excuse me, but... but you wrote fifteen hundred lire. And I paid you two thousand and two!"

"Si, si signore," she whispered hoarsely, and her gnarled hands began to climb my jacket. "It's the taxes. I have to pay such a high tax on the rental income. This way..." and she drummed on the receipt, "I pay considerably less. For the housing agency it's a trifle, they get almost the same percentage. But for me... well, you understand."

"I understand. And I want another receipt."

She stretched with a grimace of painful surprise. "But signorino, there will be no trouble between us. Only for the taxes that I must...

"No, signora."

"Donna mia," she wailed. "Donna mia, so many worries a poor lonely woman can have..." and she trudged away with her cumbersome receipt.

A few minutes later her trembling voice was heard from behind the door: "Signorino, venga qua... Now I've changed it. Fifteen hundred - and six hundred." She handed me two strips of paper with blue stamps.

"Signorino, I'm not feeling well..."

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

"Oh, I don't know," she whined, "stomach ache and dizziness... Maybe I ate too much strange food yesterday..."

"Maybe it's overexertion?" I blurted out at random, I had never seen her work.

"No, no. I only have this house to look after. I'm all alone these days. When I need help, a woman comes to do the washing and cleaning."

"Why don't you take a holiday and visit your sister in Rome?"

"Rome? Yes, of course. But it's so tiring... all the noise and bustle. And my sister has her family and her work... And besides..." A deep sigh. "Besides, I'm so used to my home. I lived here for many happy years with my husband." She gave me an anxious and sad look. "It's not easy to change habits, signorino, when you're old..."

"We have a university, but no student life in the true sense," Lando had said of Perugia. It was a partially unjustified statement. The young people who studied there certainly found life quite rich and fascinating. But there was a gap between the students and the people in general - and not just in terms of interests. The difference was rather social and material. People who can afford to get higher education in Italy are certainly not poor. In Paris, professors and students and workers often sit in the same bistro. Not so in Italy, at least not in Perugia.

I frequented the usual eateries and wine taverns but did not meet any students there. In the evenings, however, they gathered on Corso Venucci, talkative and excited and somehow inaccessible in their self-absorbed interest in each other.

Once I went up to the university - without knowing whether I was allowed there. It was a peaceful Saturday evening. I stumbled into one of the student residences. A female caretaker asked what I wanted.

"Meet one of the students... who speaks English," I muttered awkwardly.

"There is no one here who speaks English," replied the surprised caretaker. "Sir, you have made a mistake. The university for foreigners is not far from here... " But that was not what I was looking for.

I had to make do with the museums. And there I was - certainly not disappointed. I was most attracted to the Etruscan antiquities. I knew very little about Etruscan culture. I approach all kinds of art as if it were music - intuitively, by opening myself to it in the only way that is natural to me. My attention is my inner self and the response is a fierce sensual desire. Wagner's music, Roman sculpture and Raphael's painting leave me cold, to take a few examples. But I react with pleasure to Byzantine glass, to Giotto's painting or something by the Mexican Castellanos, to pagan rhythms or a sonata by Mozart. When you are self-taught in terms of art and aesthetic values, you are allowed to trust your intuition to reach contact with the beautiful. And I believe that intuition leads you most surely to the pure and undefiled in art.

I had great pleasure in the Etruscan treasures of the museum. The bronze objects, especially the images of gods, were a source of endless fascination for me. They were strikingly expressive and carefreely unartistic, their immediate charm must have had its origin in an instinctive desire to live a natural life. It is not surprising that the greatest artists of our time try to recover something of this. And so few succeed...

I was seized with deep admiration for the urns with their puzzlingly vivid, sharply marked inscriptions and light grace.

The museum was spacious and very well-ordered and the staff did not hide their pride in the collections. The caretakers were happy to tell me about the various objects. In France, you give tips left and right for that kind of attention. But not here. Nothing was expected of the visitor but appreciation for LE COSE ANTICHE. "Etruscan!" a caretaker might proudly exclaim, standing next to you to admire the treasures. I thought of the man in Rimini and linked back to my earlier reflections: It is the past that Italians are proud of - not the present. Their pride is absolutely self-indulgent and at the same time somehow tormented and apologetic... Almost as if the ancient remains represented a way of life that they have lost, and they only occasionally wanted to admit their regret over the loss...

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A crowd of people has gathered on a street below the hill. People are jostling and pushing each other on the curb, spilling out onto the road and twisting their necks to be able to stare in the same direction - towards the south where the highway runs into the city.

"What's up?" I ask a tall young man who has stood behind a short man.

"Corso," he answers narrowly.

"Ah? -"

The young man discovers that I am a foreigner. He spins his hands, imitating a wheel. "Corso di bicicletti. Come Coppi - capisce?"

"No -"

"Non capisce Coppi?" he gapes, staring at me with round eyes. Then he spits with distaste on a patch of asphalt where no feet happen to be and adds: "E Bartali?"

"Yes, Bartali. Is he in the competition?"

The young man spits again. "No!" And turns his back on me.

People stream in from all directions. In a doorway behind me stands a man with a barefoot, black-haired boy sitting astride his shoulders. The boy points to the road and says something in a voice like a tinkling silver bell. The crowd stiffens with excitement and a scooter whizzes past unfazed. A neat policeman in a blue uniform stands on the street corner, waving with his white glove. "One step back over there, back. They need room to turn..."

Time passes. A trolleybus whizzes up the hill, its windows plastered with curious faces.

"Aaaahhhh!" The crowd presses forward to get a better view when two motorcycles appear in the distance. The riders are clad in shiny black leather, their shiny buttons and buckles gleaming in the sunlight. They brake into the intersection, cast authoritative glances around them, and drive on. The crowd is remarkably resilient and holds its

breath with excitement, it is simply enchanted.

Suddenly a car comes into view. It is painted bright yellow. On the roof of the car shines a bright yellow model of a gas cylinder with the text LIQUIGAZ I OGNI COMMUNI. The car skids around the corner and sprays a cloud of yellow advertising stickers straight into the face of the neat traffic policeman. Laughter. The car disappears.

But now, now... now a string of tiny dots runs along the road at lightning speed. They approach, the cheers grow to a crescendo, they fly past in a tightly packed mass. Through the maddening noise I catch glimpses of whirling wheels, violently pumping legs and bobbing heads.

"Dove e Campagnaro?" someone shouts.

A long pause. And then a lone figure approaches on his bicycle. His tired legs are smeared with oil and dust, his once immaculate shirt is black with sweat, over one shoulder a spare tire droops.

"Cam-pagna-ro-o-o ..." The cheers die down and end in a lament of angry disappointment. And then it's all over. The crowd spreads across the street and slowly seeps into the side streets.

Italy is luxury, hunger and political seesaw. Italy is radical emblems on dirty gray walls, torn posters that one party has put up and the other has torn down, threats and appeals scrawled on stone and plaster and rusty iron. But everywhere and everywhere one's eye meets in bold letters the inviting call VV BARTALI - VV COPPI! A new era is welcomed...

I wander through almost deserted streets away from the center and finally find myself standing in an alley on the outskirts of the city, in Perugia's backyard, so to speak. Here everything is part of something else, with or against its will. A small, cramped house made of hewn stone and logs is - oh horror - built together with a disgusting complex of concrete and brick where rusty iron grilles grin over battered windows. Two angels in white tile relief and a dusty red lion complete the decor. Nearby stands a large apartment building with light plaster walls and green-painted glass.

I sit on the curb. From here I can make out the leafy hills that roll to the east and the imposing mass of the city just to the left. Children ap-

pear as if from nowhere, tripping forward to solemnly inspect me and starting to play nearby. A cat arches its shiny black back, sways away and pushes its back against a wooden support that leans against a crooked wall. The windows above are ablaze with flowers and are bulging with laundry. The air is warm and dry and still. The neighborhood resembles a small town. But up there on the hill sits a real old Italian citta!

Old Perugia has dignity. It sits in an unshakable nest. So far it has managed to resist all the invasions of modern times. The historic mass of hewn stone, shaped and built by hand, halts the advance of the machine age. Around old Perugia - below its walls and gates and towers - factories and modern high-rise buildings crowd together, traffic roars... But they have not gone further than the ancient fortifications. They cannot. The immense mass of stone simply cannot be taken by storm. It must be undermined, completely demolished. And that will take time. But time seems to have no meaning for Perugia.

Old harmonious world of stone... How much more true it is as a framework for Italian life than all the new things being thrown up around Perugia and elsewhere in the country. Old stone gives these people the closeness to life they need to be able to live according to their instincts, in the same way they have wanted to live up to now. Even poverty had its place - however painful it may have been - in this element.

If only the new order - all the construction and mechanization - had at least put an end to poverty. But it has not. It has only transformed poverty into a component of the general confusion. The new order places the Italians in a different living environment and abandons them to their fate in complete disorientation. The changes that have taken place on the outskirts of Italian cities, where the brand new and the ancient are mixed together in the same soup, are downright horrifying. And poverty in our days has become more shameful than ever, now that it is less excusable.

Perugia is not really poor, it is a favored city. But on the outskirts, filth and poverty probably prevail, as everywhere in Italy. The new pushes in, the old pushes back, it leads to fierce conflicts - and who

wins? How are Italians supposed to live when modernization has been carried out throughout the country and LA BELLA ANTI CA IT ALIA no longer gives them its warmth? Will it result in a better life for everyone - or will it end in piles of rubble and a bunch of machines crawling around in the ruins?

I climb up the steep alley, dive through low archways that resemble tunnels drenched in eternal shadow and emerge onto the street again. Under the Italian tricolor at a barracks gate, a group of carabinieri chatter. They are compact, angular men with black mustaches and white teeth. They stick their thumbs in their belts, swing around on mirror-shiny heels and throw challenging glances at the girls who trip past.

In the piazza outside the church of San Dominico, children tumble around noisily and chase each other like whirling leaves in the wind...

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3 a.m. - and cold, damp, gray. I walk down to the piazza to catch the first trolleybus of the day to the station. Perugia is still asleep, the stone labyrinth is empty. Everything is so quiet, not a sound, not a movement. I pass the town hall - palatial and reserved, with grimly closed gates in pointed arches where lions and griffins huddle together to leap. The street is covered with advertising posters, cellophane covers, cigarette butts. The deep, crooked little alleys, which wind in all directions from the heart of the city like a spiderweb pattern of stone, still rest in the curse of the night and the fog creeps there... I find myself walking on tiptoe, as if the slightest step were an intrusion into the silence. I sense the presence of Perugia's ancient life floating like a component of the fogs and time.

One of a hundred closed doors gapes open. A man has taken a seat on the worn threshold. Behind him, wicker baskets hang as if in a cellar swallow. The man sits with his legs crossed and a half-finished basket on

his knees. He wears a gray slouch hat. His face is serious.

"Buon giorno, signore."

He looks up and nods "buon giorno" and when our greetings meet and mingle in the hazy air, he bends over to his work again.

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Twice I was on the verge of being turned away. As we approach Folignio, the conductor takes my ticket, glances at it, glances again, and with a dirty finger he points at me under the nose: "The ticket was stamped yesterday, the seventeenth-"

"That's right. I bought it yesterday."

The conductor frowns disapprovingly and puts the ticket in his uniform pocket. "It must be used for the first time on the same day it is stamped, signore. That's what the regulations say."

"But I couldn't travel yesterday... Here, my ticket!"

The conductor gives me a crushing look and moves on, cutting up other people's tickets. But he returns shortly.

"The regulations, signore, stipulate that a regular ticket should be used for the first time on the day for which the same date is stamped - capisce?"

"Of course I understand ... But yesterday I asked the constable in Perugia if I could use this ticket as today. And he said yes. The constable said that..."

The finger twitches again. "What he said doesn't mean a jot. The regulations stipulate literally..." and the conductor rattles off the whole paragraph once more. Then the train slows down and stops and he falls onto the platform. In the unreal light of dawn I see him talking to an official whose uniform cap is a little neater and has more red ribbons than his own. When the conductor comes back in, he fishes my ticket out of his pocket and announces sternly: "Va bene, but remember that next time ..." and with that he pinches a neat round hole in one corner

of the ticket.

In Foligno there was a change of train for Rome and consequently a new conductor. His remark had less force than the first - the ticket had a small round hole.

At an intermediate station some workers entered the compartment. They seemed to be capable professionals, they were young and had thick hair, strong clean necks and callused fists. Their clothes were simple but not gaudy. The workers took out half-smoked cigarettes and lit them with the same match. One of the group had a handsome face with bold features, at once alert and primitive. He slammed his lunchbox on the bench next to him and began digging with a crooked fork into a mess of meat and macaroni. He seemed to be smiling faintly at the others' conversation...

"Don't try to convince me that it can't happen again in a week or a month, Pietro," said a broad-shouldered, muscular man with wavy hair.

"I'm not saying it won't happen again. It probably will. I'm just saying that if they started producing tractors..."

Pietro wore a thin mustache that didn't go with his flat nose. He stared gloomily at the floor in front of him.

"One hundred and fifty old men last week. In six months they've laid off fifteen hundred."

"And in six months they'll lay off fifteen hundred more, including us. They're switching to a shift." Pietro dug his thumb and forefinger into the depths of his mouth.

"The foundry is at best finishing its last orders -"

"I know -" and Pietro spat thoughtfully. He stared at the oyster-like spittle stain on the floor.

The handsome man had put away his lunchbox. "It'll be a matter of time," he laughed. "And about perseverance. If they fire enough of us and we do something together before we starve to death - THEN the factory will produce tractors." He scratched his genitals furiously.

When the train stopped next to mountains of rusty metal and tall chimneys spewing thick sulfur-yellow smoke, the men clambered out again.

The journey continued between gently rounded hills and fields of brown-spotted grass stubble. On the slopes were vineyards and orchards in neatly striped strips. I was just thinking about how rarely one found truly untouched nature even in the Italian mountain regions - when the train rushed into a region of chaotic bare rocks and ravines choked with greenery. How beautiful, how stimulating they were in their isolated freedom! And at the same time frightening, as unbroken land can be in Italy, and welcoming after so much disciplined and groomed beauty.

The train rumbled into a gorge overgrown with thick-stemmed, withered scrub forest that resembled Japanese dwarf pines. And suddenly, across the red, weathered slope, a village was outlined, as eroded as the rock to whose shoulder it clung - and seemingly as ancient. Dwellings that were one with the mountain and time. A wall that climbed up between broken rocks to a parapet and that continued steeper and scarred towards a lonely tower on the crest of a rugged peak. Immovable and lonely it stood there, a dark tower against the azure sky, remote and filled with peace. Because it was out of reach during the fleeting moment I saw it and because I never got to know its silence and the musty secrets of the vaults, it became a vision that I will not forget.

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The room had never been used as a home. It contained, first of all, a row of wooden benches and a podium and behind this on the wall an Italian flag and portraits of Togliatti and Nenni on either side. Small red, blue and orange pennants sagged from the smoke-stained ceiling, and propaganda posters hung on the cracked, faded plaster walls. In one corner stood an unpainted wooden table, and beneath the three large red letters that formed the word BAR was a shelf with two dusty bottles.

Despite its untidy and shabby appearance, the room had a very specific purpose. It was for people who could not afford to furnish it and who came here because they lacked a better meeting place.

On the wall by the entrance hung a placard that proclaimed: VERRA IL GIORNO IN QUI VOI POR TERETE L'ITALIA ALLA CATASTROFE: E ALLORA TECHERA A NOI COMMUNISTI SAL VARE IL NOSTRO PAESE.[1]

I waited for a while in an untidy office outside the meeting room. A man with glasses and sloping shoulders was sitting at a table writing. A shabbily dressed woman explained why her husband had not shown up for the meeting the previous evening. She was humble and low-key, eager to get out as soon as the matter was done. A crowd of people - not exactly filthy but as hopelessly shabby as poor Italian workers can be - wandered in and out of the office. They hesitated at the door, asked if they could get in, and meekly expressed what was on their minds. The secretary sat listening over his papers, answered curtly, and then went back to work. He was busy with the membership statistics.

In the bookcase next to his desk were a few tattered, greasy volumes: Lenin, Gorky, Marx, Stalin - and a large number of propaganda tracts.

Behind the secretary's bent back hung a clumsily written notice:

"All business is paid in cash - absolutely nothing on credit."

A man came in and announced that the secretary could see me. He took me into another room.

Four compagni were waiting there. The secretary was not yet forty years old. He had alert eyes and a sharply drawn face. He was well-built, with the body of an athlete and the head of a thinker - a leader. Next to him sat a youthful compagni, who might have been a student, and a swarthy and rather pugilistic type with too square a chin, and at the end of the table - a middle-aged man with delicate features and gentle, far-seeing eyes. He was a cripple.

They stuck to their talking points. They could have simply de

[1] Quote from a speech by Nenni

clared: “It is a question of the possessed and the dispossessed. We are the dispossessed. We demand what is rightfully ours.” But instead they explained the matter very thoroughly, carved out their hard-edged facts and pounded them into my skull. They wanted to show that they were clear-sighted, that they had ready-made plans and were making great progress, “Italy, which possesses potential wealth, is still poor. Or rather - a few people are immensely rich and the rest desperately poor. Two extremes and hardly anything in between. The masses are being deceived and exploited. The government, which has allied itself with the United States, is leading the country towards state bankruptcy and war. Big finance produces weapons, rayon silk and automobiles, but Italy’s natural resources remain largely undeveloped. The capitalists’ profits are sent abroad instead of being invested at home. From a financial point of view, Italy is a bad investment for selfish rich people.

Agricultural methods are antiquated. Oxen are used as draft animals, just as in the Middle Ages, not modern tractors. The irrigation system is unsatisfactory in many provinces.

Italy’s three natural regions - the north, the center and the south - each have their own set of problems. The Partito Communisto Italiano has drawn up plans that could be put into immediate effect in fact in all three places.

In the north there are large landed estates in private hands. On some of the estates the peasants have founded inefficient cooperatives. The landlords earn money, the farm workers are poor. Here the PCI proposes to eliminate the private owners and their profit system by taking over the land and distributing a share of the profits among the farm workers and finally reinvesting the rest in machinery for cooperative farms, irrigation systems, etc.

In central Italy the farms are usually small but this does not mean that there is a self-owning peasantry. The land is in the hands of rich landlords who lease it to peasants for extremely high rents - often half the harvest. Among the 95,000 proprietors in some parts of Umbria, 1,500 own as much as 60% of the land - including the best arable land. 70,000 own less than 10%. The small The workers are impoverished.

The PCI would immediately redistribute the arable land with state aid, establish machinery centers and establish agricultural technical advice for everyone.

The people of Southern Italy are miserable wretches who live in terrible poverty and ignorance under feudal oppression. But vast areas in these regions lie fallow."

"And there are many other places where the land is not or is not being cultivated," interjects the man with the square chin. "When it doesn't pay for a gentleman to cultivate it, so be it. In 1948, some hungry and unemployed farm workers went out to a dispossessed estate where they intended to restore the land. But the militia chased them away. Eight workers were murdered - they were shot. You didn't know that, did you? The newspapers in some countries prefer not to talk about such things, eh, signore. No, they prefer to write about how we obstruct the Senate..." He leaned heavily forward over the table covered with old copies of the newspaper L'Unita and the secretary joined in the conversation again.

"The PCI's first measures in the south were to divide the latifundia into small plots of land and hand them over to the tenants with full ownership. The collectivization system cannot be implemented in the atmosphere of fear and ignorance that prevails down there now. The next step would be the raising of the level of popular education and only in the third stage would collective farming be introduced."

"The system does not seem very communistic," I said.

"You understand, signore, these are only the broad outlines of the party's plans," interjected the cripple who had been listening to the others with dreamy attention. "Each region has its own particular difficulties. Time is needed to come to terms with them . . . We are going slowly, slowly... piano, piano..."

"What is he keeping silent about?" I wondered.

There were no digressions or subtleties in the conversation; the four compagni stubbornly continued their drumbeat on the main points.

The young fellow raised the question of industry. He had a strong, penetrating consolation. "The industrialists of Italy are short-sighted in

their cunning," he said. "They squeeze out every drop of profit they can, without a thought for the country and its future. The government has undertaken to rearm Italy. The production of war material has soon exhausted its backlog. The factories are already beginning to curtail their operations - but they are not yet switching to other consumer goods - things that Italy would need or could export.

A large factory in Terni employed eight thousand workers. At present it has only five thousand employees and the management intends to lay off another two thousand. The factory works for the military. The PCI wants it to produce tractors and agricultural implements. Then it can employ eight thousand men - and more. But Italy's finances are so mismanaged that the people have little purchasing power. The result - if tractors were put on the market today, ordinary farmers would not be able to afford to buy them. The government does not want to help, the rich landowners ignore all this because they earn their living by plowing with oxen and the capitalists' billions sleep sweetly in foreign bank vaults. The situation is terrible..." and he fixed me with his clear, eager boyish eyes. "Italy's industrial production and foreign markets are hopelessly limited by the government's policy. Take, for example, trade. It is natural for Italy to trade with some of its neighboring Balkan states. We complement each other and both parties can profit from it. But the government is bound by treaties with the United States. And the Americans decide what Italy should do or not do. When Hungary, for example, offered to buy electrical equipment, the Italian manufacturers were not allowed to fulfill the orders.

Italy is oppressed by a system of privilege and exploitation, and power is in the hands of a wealthy few. The entire economic machinery of the country has fallen into disarray and is being run down. The PCI demands that industry be reorganized and expanded. It should be rationalized so that it corresponds to the resources and needs of the nation. Capital must be strictly controlled. It is not a question of eliminating private property; we only want to supervise its application. The Communists want to encourage - and if necessary - force the capitalists to reinvest their profits in industry. Certain groups, such as FIAT, as well

as some of the big monopolies in chemicals, electrical equipment, and so on, must be socialized. But this applies only to the very largest enterprises. We want to leave the medium-sized and small ones in private hands and let them cooperate with the general program.

The PCI has drawn up special and practical proposals for each particular industry and region. The plans are calculated down to the smallest detail, with production standards, natural resources..."

"What you are proposing is a compromise," I said.

"How so? - Why should it be a compromise?" he asked, blushing.

"You want rationalization, not pure socialism."

"Not... exactly," he replied hesitantly. His tense and purposeful expression had not changed. "We want, first of all, to remedy the misery... by the means most appropriate... at this time. We have a plan that can be put into action immediately, a program by and for the people. Later... when the country has developed and made progress..."

Are these people cautious, polished - or simply realists? I could not help wondering. Do they know exactly what their plans would result in? I said: "Your reforms are only theoretical so far. You cannot implement them, because you are not in power."

The man who answered me - the pugilist - spoke with slow emphasis: "We have the votes but not the power," he said. "Power is at present in the hands of a minority who use violence. They rule Italy because they have the Carabinieri in front of them, the Church behind them and corrupt politicians on both wings." He spoke more quickly now. "Italy has a democratic form of government but lacks laws that would allow the constitution to function properly. The PCI wants to enact such laws and enforce them, while the government is not only trying to prevent the constitution from being implemented but is also eroding its edges." He turned to his comrades as if to gain their approval, a confirmation of the grim truth of his words.

"The despots and schemers are fortunately clumsy," said the secretary. "They are hastening their own downfall. The people are beginning to see through many of the lies that the state and the church feed us."

"The Catholic Church condemns you," I said. "What is your atti-

tude towards Catholicism?"

The comrades flinched and glanced at each other. The answer reached me through a mist of uncertainty - not undisguised fear, rather a kind of impersonal displeasure.

"The PCI is not an opponent of religion, the Communist Party has nothing in common with the Catholic Church as a religious influence. But when the church interferes in political matters, there is trouble. Of course, the church controls the educational system. It runs schools, orphanages, summer camps, and so on. No, there are no 'free' or state schools. The constitution requires such, but the government has handed over the school system to the church. This is in fact a brake on development. But not forever... Of course, the influence of Catholicism on the little ones cannot be denied. However, we believe that when our children grow up and are confronted with life as it really is, they will free themselves from the church's embrace. More and more young people have begun to ask difficult questions. It is all very well to preach that man should be good and honor God and what is above, but when one's life becomes a mere consequence of injustice, the promises of a purely spiritual salvation gradually lose their allure... And that is what happens... We have no intention of attacking the Church directly."

"Our motto is: Politics is the business of the government - and religion of the church," said the cripple. The others sought his support. In his low-key, unpretentious sincerity he won general respect and attention when he added: "The Italians are religious. They believe in God and miracles. When the priest talks about God they listen - but when he talks about politics they leave the church, they simply go their separate ways." He smiled. "It is difficult for the underprivileged to reconcile Italian living conditions as they are today with the teachings of the Catholic Church."

"There are even communist priests," the black-faced man interjected with a nervous laugh. He continued seriously: "We are gaining ground. The masses are with us because their interests are also ours. They have not become accustomed to thinking for themselves. But they have always had to grapple with the problems of life, they have had to, since

the problems concern them in the highest degree. The party is run by educated men. It is natural for educated and cultured people to be communists." His words were as rough as his manner. And he looked at his compagni as if to gain their approval. It was as if he had said something he did not quite understand, but of which he was proud. In relation to the people of whom he had spoken, the uncouth, the self-taught comrade on a different plane, he was striving for an idea and its realization.

"The PCI has achieved in ten years what the Church with its dogmas has failed to do in a millennium," said the secretary. "In the last elections, more than half the votes in this district went to us - to the leftist parties."

I found it as difficult to limit my questions as my doubts. "You just said that the people resent a certain church interference in politics. But to what extent does religion influence their personal stance? Can you achieve anything real in cooperation with people whose faith in their ability to take their lives into their own hands is weaker than their faith in miracles and heavenly rewards?"

"On the contrary, they want to participate actively and believe in earthly things-"

"How strong is the enthusiasm in that case?"

"What do you mean - how strong? Once they have accepted something as truth, they are loyal. It is in their nature to be loyal."

Yes, it is, I realized with a mixture of regret and hope. And that is why it is so difficult for them to accept a new idea or any truth that contradicts concepts to which they have been faithful for centuries.
I said cautiously: "Their obedience - is to some extent a handicap for you at the moment. No. What I wanted to say was: Do you expect that political enthusiasm and cooperation can become a kind of religion - as in Russian communism, for example?"

The secretary shook his head. "No. Our goal is united and positive action - not a new 'religion'. We are trying to deal with social injustices and injustices. Our people have their religion, their beliefs. No. Enthusiasm is one thing, religion is another."

"And you are somewhere in between?"

"We recognize our limitation," the secretary replied. "The people are joining us more and more. We want them to continue doing so. The people want to know the truth. We are doing what we can to help people find it. We are publishing books and magazines that cost very little. We are organizing meetings and discussion evenings... And we are gaining new followers. We are fighting against tyranny and against the Church as an accomplice of reaction - not against religion as such."

"Speaking of the role of the Church in political and economic contexts," I said, "one might say that Italy's overpopulation belongs to both problem complexes. What do you think about birth control? Do you support it?"

Once the four compagni turned uncomfortably. "We believe that some effective forms of birth control... would... be... desirable," the secretary finally said. "But it should not be imposed on the people against their beliefs and wishes. It is something that can be introduced when popular education has been increased. The question is important, it is true. But it is not of decisive importance. First we must overcome our current economic crisis -"

It was useless to point out that the latter was caused by the former and the latter in turn by the faith that the comrades were so reluctant to challenge, I thought to myself. The youngest of the four had balanced on the edge of his rickety chair, leaning forward, with nervous twitches in his sensitive face. Now he intervened. "We are accused of wanting to use violence. It is not true. We here in Italy have seen war up close, we know what violence means. And we want peace. We will seize power by democratic means. By the vote of the people. The government's policy is not its own but that of the United States. If the Americans were to de-pollute our present rulers today, the government would all take power tomorrow and the people would take power. We are willing to wait. But when our time comes - and we trust that it will come - then we will demand our right. Any attempt to deprive us of power, to deny our legal rights lead to civil war, guerra civila. In Spain it was not the democrats who rebelled. It was the fascists' desire to prevent the democrats from ruling that caused the civil war there."

"Do you think it could happen in Italy?"

"We think - no, we know, that it need not happen here, signore."

"Then you are willing to wait a long time?"

"How long?" he replied sharply.

"Because your vote figures are not yet decisive."

"We hope they will be soon."

"In the next election?"

The secretary interjected in his calm voice: "No, no, that is a little too optimistic." He noticed that I glanced past him at the three portraits hanging in a row on the unpainted wood-fibre wall. He continued without turning around: "It is alleged that we are imitating the Soviet Union. The accusation is unjust. We admire Russia as an example of what a united, hard-working people can achieve. We are striving for a similar goal. But our path is our own path."

"In other words, you mean to say that you do not consider the Italian problems to be the same as those of Russia?"

"Ideologically, they are the same problems, but in practice they are different. The USSR has achieved total socialism. We consider it impossible in Italy. Russia has unlimited resources, and we do not. Therefore, we want to make the best of what we have - in our own way. By... rationalization..."

The door opened and a large, corpulent man in a gray suit entered. All I remember of his face is a high forehead and clear gray-blue eyes. He carried a bundle of papers under one arm and an umbrella dangled from his wrist. His clothes were threadbare and wrinkled, but he had a natural dignity. He glanced at me. "Scusi," he said, and then "Parlez vous français? - Or English, perhaps?" he continued easily. "You'll have to excuse us. The comrades and I have to go to a meeting. I began to wonder what could have happened to them," he added with a hearty smile.

"It was probably my fault," I said.

"The doctor is going to make a speech at the meeting," the secretary explained, rising.

I took leave. I had not expected the Italian Communist Party to

behave like this...

According to some observers, Italian socialism, due to historical developments, must become unusually extreme. They like to conjure up a vision of millions upon millions of Italian land-proletarians and unemployed who - if we are to believe them - reject all social reforms of a Western nature and cry out for revolution.

Other wise men claim that the Italian Communists are not at all like the Russians. They consider them to be real socialists and, above all, Italians.

The four compagni had spoken of rationalization... Was it because they knew that the nation would not accept a drastic and anticlerical program? Or did rationalization conceal far-reaching and radical plans?

A representative of the Christian Democrats - the ruling party - said to me: "The whole communist propaganda campaign is a deliberate deception. The communists present themselves as the supposed saviors of Italy. But what can they offer the nation? Pigs and sewing machines. It's pure barter. Pigs and sewing machines for votes in the elections. Il signore votes communist and takes home two piglets. La signora gets a brand new sewing machine for her well-being. Bravissimo! But think for a moment - if, let's say, twelve million people were stupid enough to fall for the trick - where would all the pigs and sewing machines come from?... Besides, whatever happens is the government's fault. Overpopulation, unemployment, even the floods of the past year are blamed on the government. If the sea were to dry up tomorrow, the government would be to blame.

The communists are shouting about reorganization and land reform. It's easier said than done. Those who shout the loudest forget that the government has actually accomplished a great deal. That's exactly what it has. Public works, afforestation, conversion of factories to civilian production. And as for land reform - what do the communists really want? That the land be divided - one, two, three - and distributed among the tenants. And what will happen then? Who will farm those plots? Where is the money to pay for the purchase of agricultural machinery and fertilizers and the construction of irrigation facilities? The

government is currently drawing up plans for how a gradual reorganization will be financed. It will take time.

The communists are demanding that we do business with Russia and the satellite states. What can we sell? Textiles? Russia doesn't want our fabrics. Automobiles? Never mind! We sell some fruit in those countries, yes. We need iron ore and can't get any. We need wheat - and Russia's export prices are high, much higher than prices elsewhere. Czechoslovakia wants to sell us porcelain and the like - but we can't import porcelain exclusively. Oh, my, the Communists are trying to pull people by the nose. Their rationalization is a trick of the war. If they come to power we will get Russification instead - with all that THAT entails.

And the solution It's not easy to say. The situation is very serious now. Italy is a small and poor country. And we have fifty million inhabitants - overpopulation is our biggest problem. We are trying to sort out the emigration question with certain countries as best we can. It's complicated and involves terrible costs. Brazil has offered us land for colonization. But we can't send people out into the jungle to die. "Technical preparation is needed, money..."

I asked about birth control - was it not indispensable for any permanent solution to Italy's dilemma?

"Birth control is against our religion, our people do not want it", the official replied firmly.

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If it were not for the river, Tivoli would be one of many small towns up here in the mountains. But the river made everything different. Over the centuries it has periodically come storming through the town, eroding the hillside into two deep ravines. The water now flows in an artificial channel and falls a little further in a high and foaming cascade. The ravines are tropically green with vines, ferns and cypresses. Above, on the far edge of a cliff, lie the ruins of a temple. The slender columns

gleam in the sunlight, thin, fragile, precarious as if at any moment they could plunge into the depths, into the river and the rustling of leaves. Far down there in a little Eden the water rumbles without ceasing. A mist of shining drops hangs like a cloud in the gorge and a shimmering rainbow lights up and fades, lights up and fades again.

The ravines and the houses that balanced on the cliff edge were so heavenly beautiful that one lost one's breath. But they were somehow lonely and abandoned in their beauty...

The beauty that one so often encounters in Italy is neither fleeting nor transient. It is not subtle, seasonal and untamed like nature in northern countries. Here it has been shaped by man. And so it must be. For centuries it has been so. The marks and traces of man have marked every inch of the land. And we encounter only cultivated fields and a few inaccessible verdant paradises like down here in Tivoli.

Picturesque history! Only a people whose lives it has shaped can truly understand this beauty. The Italians' love for their country does not originate in love for nature. "Bella... bella" is not so much an exclamation of admiration as an expression of their longing for beauty, a constant desire for beauty in life. These people know nothing of the secret virginal hiding places of nature. It does not concern them. They are enriched by things that have hardly anything to do with nature as a source of peace and contemplation. They have their daily work, the relics and memorials of their past - above all the sun. One could perhaps say that Italy is not beautiful if you are in -living contact with the country - only picturesquely. The picturesque setting for people who are easy to like and difficult to understand.

Behind me a mountain slope rose gray and burnt by the sun above the olive groves and the country road. At my feet the steep slope fell straight down into the depths of the gorge. The ground was hard, stony and hot. Here and there grew a tuft of grass or thistles purple as tropical flowers. And there was mint somewhere nearby - I could smell the sharp cold scent of mint through the warm smells of grass that floated up with the water vapor.

A farmer in his donkey cart clattered past on his way into town. A

girl on a bicycle passed in the opposite direction, blazed for a moment like a blue bird between the trees and disappeared.

The sun rose in the sky and lit up the back of the town where the factories are. It was hard to believe that they could have anything to do with Tivoli. But there they lay - lumpy sooty blocks on a blackened mountainside. Smoke hung over them in gray clouds, sewage gurgled in yellow dirty ditches between the rows of factories.

Somewhere in the sooty slum a street ran down to the main road and Rome. I pulled off at the bottom of the mountain and rolled into Tivoli on that street. Perhaps I would never have bothered to stop here if I hadn't come from that direction...

A bell struck twelve. The ringing bounced across the ravine chased by the drawn-out falsetto whistle of a factory whistle. I spread my jacket on the ground and set out sandwiches and a jar of marinated olives. Around me the trees raised fragile branches with silver-green dark leaves and half-ripe fruits the size of a fennel. Low, flat, grotesquely twisted trunks supported the silvery foliage. How could something so gnarled, bone-hard and dry be living trees? They looked more like mythical creatures turned to stone in a distant fairyland. They had no bark at all - just brown, knotty tendons of hard, bare wood that twisted and coiled their way up from the sunburned ground and branched out into the green clouds of foliage.

I leaned back against a tree trunk, heard a faint rattle, and turned. A small, shiny object had fallen from the twisted branches. It was a snail shell, or rather a seashell - empty, white and dry, with a swirl of bright red dots. I looked closer at the tree spirals and discovered a whole village of snail houses - all gaping and uninhabited, wedged between the gnarled tendons of dull brown wood. I loosened one of the shells - and a swarm of ants swarmed out of a crack in the wood. The ants' bodies looked like three small pearls, two of ebony and one of amber. Had the ants eaten the snails? And how had the shells gotten wedged in that way? The tree had long since stopped growing -

The day was getting hot. And the olive grove's treetops were too sparse to shield it from the sun. I gathered my things, put a seashell in

my pocket, and trudged home to Tivoli along the scorching asphalt road...

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The winding alleys of the working-class neighborhood were like the streets of an old ruined city where people live because they have nowhere else to go. Dilapidated shacks leaned wearily against each other, low brick buildings emitted pungent odors and shook with machine sludge - and beyond them others creaked, a hundred dark gates opened like foxholes, arching walls stood menacingly on the lye. And everywhere and everywhere this teeming, seething, inextinguishable life.

It smelled of manual labor and poverty - sulfur and cellulose and gas and unhealthy, unventilated crowded living.

I was torn between despair and hope. I wanted to hurry past - and yet I lingered every time I happened to pass the block. I stood and watched the children. To walk through an Italian town is to wade through a sea of children. They crawled about in the dusty street, clung in clusters to the dilapidated stairs, climbed among the remains of dilapidated houses. Some were pale and haggard, many were unwashed and most were a little wild. But their wildness was natural to them - like that of untamed animals. In France, les enfants seemed to me strangely subdued between the outbursts of nervous energy. But the Italian bambini were consistently natural and self-aware. No wonder, for there were so many of them. The mothers who sat sewing in the doorway or in a sunlit strip on the wall of the house had less than one eye for each child. But as soon as a truck approached the street, the women threw down everything they had in their hands and rushed around roaring to catch their young. It happened with a deafening noise and masses of black smoke, and the walls shook violently as the monster with its load of logs or rolls of paper rumbled by.

A dead end cut right through the shapeless mass of the shack and

ended at the edge of a ravine. At the guardrail a crowd of wildly gesticulating children were crowded together, staring down into the ravine with tense attention. A boy in an Icelandic sweater was holding a little girl upright on the railing. She looked around wide-eyed and sucked her thumb. Several boys stood nearby, including one who was thin and sinewy and had a scarlet wool scarf tied around his pimply and swollen cheek. He was the starter and gave his comrades instructions in a clear and loud voice. Two of the boys grabbed their thick rubber tires and their short sticks and huddled together in the starting pits. "Ready," shouted the boy with the red scarf. "Go!" And he kicked one of them in the butt with his sandaled foot. The sticks hit the tires, nimble feet kicked clover into garbage and brick slag, and the two boys fell headlong into the ravine. The spectators hung over the railing, whistling, howling, and waving their arms like a bunch of mad dervishes. Their indomitable vitality could have powered a dynamo, transformed the barren mountains beyond into hanging gardens, built...

On one of the side streets I met four nuns. They came whizzing down the narrow passage like black birds. Only when they were close to me could I see their gleaming silver crucifixes and their camel-like faces almost hidden by flapping bonnets. How different they seemed here in the shadows than out on the open Corso! And what strange furtive glances they gave me... The nuns flapped like birds across a small piazza and were swallowed up by a gloomy, brooding old building - the Asilo Santo Grigorio.

I saw an old woman sitting in a doorway and stopped to ask her about the asylum. She was bent and shriveled, and her veiny hands were busy knitting. The room behind her had no windows. A little boy clung to her, staring wide-eyed at the stranger and furiously biting a piece of bread.

"It's a daycare for children," said the old woman. "It's run by the church. You pay four hundred lire per month per child. Yes, the state has a school further up town. You don't have to pay anything there. But..." she added with a shrug, "... you have to buy schoolbooks and clothes... Textbooks? No, we don't have those in Tivoli. Then you have

to go to Rome." She explained the matter very helpfully and glanced occasionally at her glittering knitting needles.

"I've seen children on the streets at all hours of the day-"

"That's right. Many don't go to school."

"But... isn't school compulsory? Don't they HAVE to go to school?"

"Oh no," the old woman smiled, "there aren't any such laws-"

I asked her about the damaged houses. The question was hardly original. But everyone answered it. I let it serve as a touchstone for public opinion.

"Lots of bombings, si," the woman nodded. "Si, that happened quite a while ago. But who could afford to rebuild? There are five of us living in the same room..." and she gestured towards the dark, windowless hovel.

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There's a saying that says you don't suffer from what you don't know about.

But there may come a day when what you do not know will hurt you greatly.

The children of Italy have inherited an unbridled energy. It enables them to play on rubbish heaps and live in earthen balls and yet have the strength to enjoy the sun and the sky.

Italian parents adore their children, they simply worship them. Their reverence for the child is primitive and deep. But they are completely unconcerned and indifferent to the child's future well-being. Children are born to exist. They come into the world, grow up, live, love and have children in their turn. The poverty of the parents becomes the poverty of the children and their ignorance becomes the ignorance of the children. Justice is set for the future - only suffering is inevitable and immediately at hand. Il fato... fate... who can doubt it?

Privileged Italians are cultured, extremely refined - proud heirs to

the historical wealth of their country. But most of Italy is darkness, a aimless groping, a merciless struggle for existence. "We need specialists," says one. "The solution lies in a new spirit," claims another. "Faith and patience," preaches a third. But must not the solution be sought primarily in knowledge, in the knowledge without which these alleys and these lives can never change? Tangible facts speak with the thousand voices of human misery.

What good can knowing anything do us if we have learned the lessons too late?

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The common where the temple of Vesta and the Sibyl had once stood... A semi-arch of columns and three walls on the verge of a paradise... It was empty and silent here - the tables and garden umbrellas were piled up in a corner of the terrace. The day was chilly with a high, cloud-streaked sky. A flock of jackdaws fluttered through the greenery. Their chatter fell like pebbles in a spring. And then the sun broke through and bathed the cypresses in gold.

"Signore, signore -"

A little girl stood not far from me. She wore a washed-out blue dress, her hair was cut in a round circle over a delicate, lovely face with large eyes shining like stars.

"Signore, caramele...", she said, approaching slowly. "Signore, signore..." - words spoken like a bird's chirping, strangely assured in their musical intonation. She spread out the dirty hem of her dress. "Non buon -" and the delightful head was gracefully tilted. "Signore, soldi -". She spoke quickly and yet insistently. And suddenly she had glanced over her shoulder at the dilapidated building on the other side of the courtyard. "Signore, caramele -".

A woman stepped out onto the steps.

And like a whirlwind of fluff in the wind the child had disappeared.

Italians do not starve; they are poor, some of them have very little to eat, but they do not need to starve, people say. As if the mere fact of not starving to death were a justification for one's existence. The same people devote themselves to discussing sociology and world politics and to psychological studies of the place of the individual in society. They particularly emphasize the role of the personal in proving that the individual has the right to express his personality (and thus the right to freedom). They apply arbitrary conclusions to others and realize that they are meaningless. And while studying the rights of the individual, they happily forget the conditions that deny him the exercise of these rights just mentioned.

The deceitfulness of such "individuality" and "freedom" talk is especially evident in Italy, where people, in order not to starve to death, have to trample each other down in the struggle for work - or else beg their way through...

I tried to imagine Naples - the hordes of children swarming in the slums among two hundred thousand unemployed people... And Sicily... No, I didn't want to go down there this year.

"Caramele", the little girl had said.

It was a pure coincidence that she hadn't said BREAD.

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In Tivoli, there are not many meters between breathtaking beauty and frightening ugliness. On one side of the mountain lie the temples and the famous verdant gorges and on the other - a sandy, rubbishy, crumbling slope with factories and dilapidated shacks and between these extremes, uniting them in seething, indomitable life - the vitality of the Italian people's soul...

Where the campagna meets the mountains below Tivoli rises a monsuuous black building on a clearing not far from the road. Around it are clustered a few huts overgrown with vines that are white with

dust. Fruit trees hang over the walls here and there and new residential buildings form angular hard blocks in the dusty greenery of the background.

The black building resembles a large fire-damaged prison. Some windows are pasted over with paper, some gaps are empty and from others shabby garments hang to dry. It is a large five-story building, almost frightening in its dilapidated desolation.

A group of boys are playing by the roadside. They are throwing stones into a reed-grown ditch where the water is rippling. I have my camera with me, in my pocket, where it is inconvenient enough. And now I point the lens at the disgusting shack.

"Ecco! "Il notro palazzo nero e fotografero", shouts a shrill boy's voice. A boy runs up to me; He could be six years old, maybe five, judging from what I can see of him. His bare legs are engulfed in rubber boots - but boots for a grown man. The threadbare, ill-fitting and too-conical jacket is fastened together across the chest with an enormous safety pin. Between the jacket and the boots two rough knees can be seen.

"Signore", the boy grins with strong grape-stained teeth, "per favore, uno di me - take a picture of me."

"Va bene." The shutter clicks. And at the same moment I am surrounded by children. They suddenly stand there as if conjured up by the camera, girls and boys in turns, young and very small, a huge noisy crowd. "Di me, di me, signore!" The camera encounters beautiful, ordinary and ugly faces, primitive and refined, uncombed manes of hair and long loose braids - and with every blink of the shutter their number increases. And new children come rushing in from all directions.

"Venga," shouts a thick-limbed youth, pulling two small boy-changelings in sack-like coats to him and laughing broadly between two shy and happy faces. "Di noi ensieme," he says, holding the little ones still. A dark red scar flares over one of his eyebrows...

The boy who had started it all is particularly present, he manages to squeeze himself into every photograph. "I'm a police constable," he explains, kicking a large stone with his flimsy boot. The other children

ignore him.

"Can you send us pictures?" someone squeaks.

I take paper and pen and say: "L'indirizzo - write down the address."

An embarrassed murmur. Who can write? "Mario... Mario possa... " A lanky boy steps forward from the crowd. With great care he scribbles down the extremely important indirizzo. "Eccolo," he exclaims, hands me the paper and looks around proudly.

"Eh, signore, don't send him the photos - he won't give the rest of us anything!"

"Yes, yes, I promise."

A resounding burst of laughter.

"That - the building," I say, pointing.

"Il nostro palazzo nero - our black palace."

"And you... live..."

"Yeah. I've lived there for five years."

"And I for eight."

"Since the war-"

The boy with the scar on his forehead points up the hill. "The houses were bombed. Boom, boom! War. Nowhere to live. So we're staying in this old factory."

He pronounces the word "factory" as easily as if he were saying "house," I think. And I ask: "Was it bombed too?"

"No. It's abandoned. Il padrone built a new factory, a nice big modern thing. Un fabrico di pasta, capisce?"

"You mean macaroni?"

"Si, si un grande fabrico. It's by the train station."

His eyes are clear under the dark red scar.

"That way... And the houses, those new ones up on the hill..." I point to the facades with the many windows.

The children glance at each other in silence. Someone clears their throats and spits.

"Signore, when will we get the pictures?"

"Soon. In four or five days." I turn to leave.

"Ancor'uno," the young voices plead.

"I don't have any more film -"

A donkey comes tripping up the hill on fragile, quick leg pegs. Two large kegs bob and creak with every step it takes. Enthroned between the kegs is a farmer, an older man, broad and thick and heavy. He has a flat red nose and yellow moustaches that droop sadly. A double-barreled shotgun dangles from a string on his back.

The ragged but cheerful group of children follow me with their eyes as I trudge along in the dusty tracks of the donkey. The boy in the rubber boots follows me alone, nipping at my heels.

"Signore! Ancor' uno di me, me solo", he chirps.

"Can't - no film."

"Look - my boots are waterproof!" The boy takes a leap from the roadside and lands in the ditch with a violent splash. He reappears laughing.

"Your trousers are soaked through!"

"It doesn't matter. Your feet are dry. Look", and the boy repeats his trick, grinning like a sun bear. "Do you want grapes - l'uva signore?"

"Grazia. Domani. Allora, a rivederci."

"A rivederci," the wet boy replies. I trudge up the hill and turn around at the bend in the road.

The boy was gone.

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I had breakfast in my room. It was cheaper that way. My room was nice. It faced east and the sunrise. In the flat dawn light, the river water seemed clear and inviting. And unless you squinted out the window and saw the rotten fruit peels and empty tin cans on the bank below, the illusion of picturesque freshness was complete. On the top of one hill stood a lone cross etched against the hazy blue sky. On the slope of another hill was an ethereal silver-gray olive grove. And on a common by the river, two carnival tents and a few small wagons waited for evening to fall again.

On the other side of the house, the streets smelled of morning and night frost and the whiff of mules tripping past with baskets full of dew-drenched vegetables on their backs. There, the scent of coffee and freshly baked bread and yellow sunshine already warmed the creaky paving of the piazza.

I bought two rolls in a bakery - two paninis. A young man with curly hair wrapped the still warm loaves of bread in paper and called out "ventedue" to the man behind the counter near the door. Another young boy put out pastries in the window. The man at the counter took the money, said something about the weather and the city, and at the same time kept a watchful eye on his sons. The shop was a family business, like most bakeries in Italy. Everyone was genuinely cordial - their "buon giorno" and "gracia lei" sounded convincing. I remembered Paris and the inescapable refrain "merci, monsieur, au revoir, monsieur" that was thrown at you like a swear word.

The starry-eyed signorina in the dairy smiled sweetly as she filled my thermos with fresh milk. And since the bottle didn't hold a full liter, it was two lire cheaper.

There was a place on the corner where I could buy plum and apple jam. Il padrone patiently and carefully rolled my meager hundred grams into a cone of wax paper. And then back to the room and my caffe eon latte that I brewed on the alcohol stove. It was almost eight o'clock now, and the sunshine was flooding the little square and the mists were lifting on the hillside. Only the olive groves in the farthest distance were still very vaguely outlined, as if they had been floating in their own mist.

On the riverbank a donkey was walking and grazing the stubby, sparse grass. The donkey's head was much too big for its body, its ears much too big for its head - and its thin, spindly legs were too spindly for the donkey as a whole. Two little boys climbed onto the little donkey's rickety back and forced it to trot around in the clearing. Then they let it loose on the beach with its halter dangling. The beach was steep and loose and the donkey got the rope tangled in its front legs. Then it immediately stretched its neck and clipped its long ears and looked

around pitifully, screaming, after the boys.

It is in the mornings that one goes shopping in Tivoli. In the middle of the shopping district is a block among the bomb-damaged houses with a church on one side. Every morning the farmers from the surrounding areas come in with fruit and vegetables. The square was patterned with fruit, deep juicy green and red and orange yellow and shimmering fruit in piled-up crates, on the sidewalks and tables. What apples I could find there! Heavy, firm apples, yellow-green and so wonderfully tasty! And cacchi that resembled overgrown orange-red plums; and grapes, green or purple, sometimes oblong like pale transparent drops of juice. The latter were expensive - one hundred and twenty lire per kilo. But ordinary grapes cost only fifty lire. And vegetables could be bought cheaper than in Perugia or Cesenatico - not to mention Rome.

On the edge of the square, a vendor has set up a stall. He has stretched a beach umbrella over the trestle table on which small tin cans are lined up like a dense carpet of labels. On the parasol pole he has stretched a meter-long brown snake skin - as protection against the Evil Eye. And on the table lie two stuffed snakes, wickedly coiled. The vendor is short and stocky, with a cheerful and round and ruddy face. He waves his hands briskly as he roars to call the attention of the square crowd.

"Step forward, good people, step forward and see your fill. I'm looking for a young man for a quick demonstration. A young man with strong nerves. Hey there, giovane! Don't you want to? And you?" He tugs at a square-faced youth by the sleeve. "How are our nerves, then?" With a quick gesture he has turned the young man's head left and right and hits him hard in the solar plexus. The victim lets out a cry of pain. "No, that won't do," roars the salesman. "You're not suitable. But you there -." Another young man steps forward with a sheepish smile. "Now, my dear fellows," roars the market stallholder, "now you must be wondering what all this is about? You've been fooled by quacks before. But never by me. Not by Alfredo Prampolini! No, never that. I've travelled the world, I've visited India, Africa and Greece - and never in my

life have I deceived a single human being. As proof of the quality of my preparations I have these...” And he waves a bundle of crumpled papers. “And as proof of my success and as a guarantee that you will be satisfied - these!” And he pulls out a bundle of banknotes as thick as a dictionary and places it on the table between the writhing reptiles. “And now!” he exclaims busily, rubbing his palms together, “now, giovane, will you tell me how your nerves are!” The answer is inaudible. “Excellent,” the salesman nods contentedly. “And your stomach?... Also good. Excellent!” He glares at the young man in the eyes and his eyes in turn stare at the bundle of banknotes between the snakes. “That’s how it should sound, a healthy young man, a real specimen! And why, one might ask, why?” He screams at the top of his lungs. “Well, because his feet don’t bother him. How many of you, good people, can in good conscience say the same? Few. Very few. You work hard. Your feet ache. Your whole body is aching with fatigue. You have CALLOUSES! Look here now...” and he gestures with one of the flat tin cans. “Here you see the ONLY CURE FOR CALLOUSES that works in practice. Here - for thirty lire a jar - the only known cure...”

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Every time I visited the oldest quarters of the city, they seemed transformed and different, full of mystery, meaningful. I could wander for hours in the whimsical labyrinths of the alleys, in light and shadow, amazed by their diversity...

Sometimes there was only the round light on a worktable, the tools and pliers and pieces of leather and a gnarled hand holding an old boot while the other hand carried a short utility knife, or the bald, graying head of the worker - nothing else, shimmering with light in the deep darkness of the little workshop.

Or it could be the door to a terribly dilapidated house where someone had placed a tray of neatly arranged fried apples on a chair

and the apple juice bubbled syrupily through the charred skin while the appetizing aroma of the baking oven evaporated in the stench of rotting garbage, urine and sour food...

Or a filthy tailor's shop where the male members of a large family were busy, the father busy cutting, while half-grown or infant sons sewed with quick fingers and flashing needles, so desperately handy and quick. And I thought about what the old woman outside the orphanage had said: "Many don't go to school..." and like an echo: "They start working very early - they have to earn their living..."

Filth, beauty and pathos - these were the leitmotifs of the alleys.

Sometimes the smells were enough to stop my steps. I might stop at one of the cave-like niches in the walls of the houses, where they sold fruit, and soak up the scent of melons and grapes and olives and perhaps buy a delicate orange-yellow cacchi.

And I was met by the smells of damp stone and greasy macaroni, the fresh breezes from leafy vineyards on the hills or the stench from cracks and crevices piled with garbage - and everything was tinged with the smell of sulfur. And suddenly the odors in the sun-saturated air could transform into something indescribably dusty, omnipresent...

Halfway down the street widened. There was a church. But what a church! A dreary facade without the slightest cross, no bell tower and a frightening plank door that only shielded the lower half of the gate... I peeked between the thick unplaned planks and made out a large, semi-dark room where large flywheels were spinning and the steam hissed in spirals. The damp, dull smell of paper pulp hung thickly around the church. How long had it been used as a workshop? Since the war? Even before the war? The machinery was clumsy and obviously outdated.

On the other side of the street, women and young girls were fetching water from a fountain. It consisted of a pile of weathered stone and resembled the last remains of a once high wall. The sculpted ornaments that had once adorned the frieze were almost worn out and formed only gray-green lumps. A few steps led to a vaulted niche and there a stone pipe opened from which the water snorted sparklingly and clearly. The water-carriers came and went in a steady stream, carrying

pitchers of dull hammered copper. The girls were well-built and agile, slender yet round-shouldered. They had an almost mature sensuality. Their movements were light, rhythmic, and full of seductive grace.

The miller's house was old like all the others, but the wide double doors stood wide open so that you could see his sacks of grain and his spacious grain bins and a sturdy grain husker. The miller was not inside. I assumed he was sitting in the trattoria next door - since it was lunch-time. But if he had been standing here in his grain storehouse he would have asked if I had seen the villas and the waterfalls. That was how we had first met. I had stopped to watch him work - and he had been very reticent at first until I said something about the town being picturesque. Then he brightened. "Yes, isn't it, and it is old, older than Rome. There is a lot to see here. The water has done a lot for Tivoli. It has helped to make the city famous and given the factories water power..."

The miller paused with the empty sieve in his fists. The flour dust lay white on his clothes and only his arms and a dry appetizing smell of grain rested over the room. "Yes, amen," he nodded, "Tivoli is rich - that is to say, part of the city is rich." Then he spoke of the Villa d'Este on the hill directly above his house, of the garden with its countless fountains, of the marble and crystals. "You really must see it," he said warmly. I replied that I would. But when the miller saw me again he would ask: "Well, have you visited the villa?" And each time I had to answer: "No, not yet -."

I asked him whether the dilapidated houses around had been bombed during the war or whether some of them were just old. This was before I knew anything about Tivoli, and I later remembered the miller's sullen reply: "Both parts. Some were bombed, others are just old. Either way, they are ruins..."

"Aren't they being repaired?"

The miller became even more irritated. "Of course! Do you see that house over there? A factory owner, a signore, has repaired it. Because that two of his officials should live there. Two families! When it could house ten. Here the factories produce goods worth millions of lire every day that God gives and the industrialists earn big money - but

they are stingy as chips. They don't spend a lira to help the workers." The miller leaned against the doorpost and followed with his eyes a ball bouncing back and forth across the street. He smiled at the playing boys and said: "In Italy we are very fond of football." He was well-built, and his silver-gray hair stood in strange contrast to his unbent, strong figure.

On one of the side streets a tower rose like a rough square post in the middle of the road. The tower had no windows, only a kind of recess at the base, at street level. Monotonous, semi-metallic hammering could be heard from its dark interior. Through the low doorway I saw a man sitting astride a kind of wooden bench or anvil. On the anvil's dome shone a cone of dull red copper sheet. With precise, automatic blows the wooden mallet fell on the sheet, bounced back two or three times, was raised again and stood still in the air for a moment while the half-finished the water jug slowly turned on the dowel. And then the blow fell in a wide semicircle, the mallet thudded one, two, three, you could hear the dull thuds of wood on soft metal. The coppersmith was still quite young and had a well-shaped head.

Does he have anything to do with the city around him? I wondered, - the city that is machine sludge and bustling, seething life ... Here he sits hammering and his whole world is a sooty den, red-hot copper and clumsy tools.

Just after the tower the street ended above a jumble of roofless, dilapidated houses. They clung to the steep side of the ravine, straight above the river and the juicy, roaring greenery below. On the right hand the bridge was visible, beside it the water swirled through a long trough and a crowd of women were washing clothes in the trough, rubbing and scrubbing in the icy water that foamed down into the greenery deep below them. On both sides of the bridge the hotels opened onto terraces where beach umbrellas shone like striped mushrooms, far out over cypresses and vineyards.

Among the ravaged ruins that gaped rooflessly at the sky, a dark rectangle covered with corrugated iron stood out. A group of children wandered around the hut until a man stepped out from under the rust-

ed roof and roared to chase them away. "They're going too close to the edge," he explained. "It's very treacherous. A boy recently fell down here and killed himself."

He was touching in his ugliness. His nose drooped like a knotted rope and the tip of his nose was twisted sideways. A disfiguring scar zigzagged across his cheek and pulled the corner of his mouth up so that the brown stumps of his teeth were exposed. Bent over the brim of a tired old hat, kind watery eyes peered at me.

"Well, you have a forge down here," I said, glancing under the tin roof - earthen floor, bellows, pliers, a handful of coke, three rusty horseshoes on a nail...

"Yes indeed. And it was a fine forge in the old days," replied the ugly one. "In the old days, that is, but not anymore. Now everything is going to be mechanized - tutto meccanizato - it's going to be electricity and steam and petrol, nothing but machines. Over there..." and he pointed to the only upright wall of a collapsed house - "there was a mill. And to the left was a vegetable oil factory. They were powered by water power. But that was many years ago. Now they have other things, modern factories..." The children crept down towards the cliff again. "Pack away!" the blacksmith shouted angrily and pointed a horn-like index finger. He stared at the white veil of mist that fluttered from the cliff. "Bella!!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "There is so much beauty to see in Tivoli. Have you been up on the mountain?" He pointed to the lonely cross. "From there you have a view of the whole town..."

I tried in vain to catch an overtone of longing, a faint hint in his rough voice. But he did not complain.

"Bella Tivoli," he repeated. And the scar on the sooty cheek frowned violently and twisted his mouth in a hearty and at the same time painful smile. Over the roar of falling water the traffic on the bridge roared.

Since many houses in Tivoli lack running water, the coppersmith is busily busy making jugs so that the girls can fetch water from the well - he deserves it because the city is backward.

The farrier, on the other hand, has become unemployed because of the new means of transport - he is a victim of progress.

There is much in Italy that is not right. The role of machines in the life of the nation, for example. In the rest of Europe, mechanical technology has introduced a completely new way of life. It has penetrated everywhere and identified itself with people's habits, needs and thoughts - or vice versa. The change has been total, for better or worse - a revolution.

But Italy is still backward. Machines make extremely slow progress here. Their influence seeps into the life of the nation through various fibers and affects it in different ways - but without changing the pattern as such. Technology makes some Italians happier, others it robs them of the little hope they have and many become much more unhappy.

An Italian lawyer once said to me: "The machine represents for us a new form of life. We are becoming more and more aware every day of the practical problems of life, the practical side of things, yes." We sat in the shade of a cypress tree beside an old stone bridge and watched the clouds of smoke in the distance that showed where the factories were. The lawyer was pleased that I had come from America. He praised our high standard of living and technical skill. He believed that Italy too could benefit from increased mechanization. "People are the same everywhere; they want a higher standard of living and better income - and less work." And he said he believed that living conditions in Italy were improving. "The upper class is in decline," he said, "and the peasants and workers are striving upwards. That is the general tendency."

"Social equality? In Italy?" I said incredulously.

"Yes-a, but not primarily through political upheavals-"

"So you think that will happen as a result of mechanization?"

"Yes," he replied. "Thanks to machines and their commercial offshoots, we have a tendency towards equality, towards greater equality. And the trend will continue. We must catch up with the developments in other countries..."

A moment earlier he had spoken affectionately of the arts and traditions, the ancient forms of life which he considered to be a vital part of Italy. I asked if "equality" would not change and distort all this.

"Not necessarily," he replied. "People have complete freedom to

preserve their individuality in everyday life. They can choose -."

"Do you think there is so much to choose from?"

"Yes, I think so. People in Italy can still live the life that is natural to them. Those who do not wish to live in big cities and work in factories do not have to do so. But on the other hand, they should not be forced to live primitively and impractically. It is by no means a question of a categorical choice, no one is forced to completely abandon one way of life for another. I believe that we can choose and combine."

"But as things stand, the individual has only the mass-produced, skillfully hyped illusion of free choice. Odet himself seems to have disguised himself as a machine. The question is how one can make a profitable exchange with fate - to live in harmony with the machines and yet not mechanize life, or work only for money. I do not know why, but I have the feeling that you Italians are trying to combine the past with the present in a way that is only likely to confuse you. You believe that you should be able to make material progress while maintaining your human sense of proportion, but deep down you're afraid of not quite getting the hang of it. Maybe you should be more daring? Maybe you should admire the past from a distance and let it enrich you like beautiful paintings or music or books do? But at the same time, engage yourself wholeheartedly in the present, let yourself be governed by a new spirit..."

"Yes, yes, it is possible that you are right," said the lawyer, "it would be more artistic that way."

I could not believe my ears. He hoped for wonders of machine culture. In the name of progress, mechanization would begin right now, but it would have to happen smoothly, without friction, and bring a multitude of blessings to everyone. The machines would even bring about a vague equality, his "equalization" . . . People would have the free choice to earn money or not - and plenty of time to enjoy the old traditions. He was not blind to the political aspect. No, far from it. But politics - that was talk. And the machines were a fact - action, results, a new and all-powerful force. "Practical problems... catching up... individuality... choosing..." I tried to fit the pieces together. It was useless.

There I sat with my jigsaw puzzle.

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The workers in Tivoli were mostly busy, dirty and tired men for whom the day began at the command of the factory whistle and ended in the short respite of sleep, men whose lives consisted of toil and hardship and waiting. Where they sat on benches in their meager trattorias, they seemed to wait, always just wait. They were neither desperate nor hopeful, only resigned like one who has long waited in vain. They gathered in the same places, at the same rickety tables in the same gang of comrades and lit small fires of friendship in the cold indifferent room.

They were probably so at ease with each other - loud and boisterous or confidential and open-hearted in their lively Italian way. Nevertheless, they were cautious and constantly on their guard. It was as if they had been waiting for an unwelcome guest. They glanced furtively at each stranger, lowered their voices, leaned closer to each other across the table. But soon they relaxed again - at least apparently.

More than ever I felt untrue, unjust. Even when I was immersed in the elementary presence of the workers, in the smell of sweat and straw and wine and tobacco, I sensed my own isolation. Only anonymity made it possible for me to stay here. And after all, I didn't want to go to the cafes in the center, to go anywhere else. I wanted to stay here among the workers. So I went to the trattoria every evening, sat there drinking and trying to talk to one of the guests. The safest way to start a conversation is also the least risky, I thought. An Italian's pride in his city is always a foundation to build on. And I turned to a man whose wide-brimmed hat shaded a snippy rodent face.

"Un bel paese, Tivoli," I said.

"Si bel," he replied. "Molti di cascadi, villi; molte a vedere."

"Lots of beautiful things - that you can't eat," someone at the next table roared. It was a man in his early middle years. He was tall,

broad-chested and bulging with muscles - like a bear. A triangle of frizzy hair stuck out from the neck opening of his freshly pressed white shirt. His face was clean-shaven and bold, and his good-natured eyes sparkled with an unscrupulous desire to contradict. "There are a lot of beautiful things in churches too," he continued with a wink at his tablemate, a thin, hollow-eyed worker whose long arms rested limply in front of him. The thin man exchanged a glance with the man in the peaked cap - both of them seemed uneasy. But the Bear wanted to speak out. "What does the Church do with all its riches for us? It offers funerals and church parties. But what joy do I get from funerals right now? And what use do I get from their processions? The Church owns a lot of property. And yet it presents itself as the symbol of truth. One plus one does not make two!" He grabbed two wine glasses and slammed them on the table. "We know that these are two different things - and here we add them ourselves..." The others looked at him with the anxious seriousness of children listening to a well-known and frightening fairy tale.

The hollow-eyed one explained to me: "He means that the teachings of the Church... and true Christianity... are not... the same thing..." His ghostly face twitched theatrically.

The bear paid no attention to his words. "It is easier for me to crawl through the eye of a needle than for a rich signor to get to heaven," he shouted. "If I starve to death in the rich man's garden, the church promises me that I will get to heaven before him. What kind of logic is this? What joy can I have from beautiful promises of a soft bed in heaven that I have to pay for down here?" He laughed loudly and clinked his glasses together, one glass in each frame.

He really does look like a bear, I thought. A huge bear that is untamed and rowdy.

"It is like this, signor," the long-armed one interrupted again, "that if one happens to be religious and believes in the teachings of Christ contrary to what the church tries to..."

"You are an old woman, Guido," the Bear sneered.

"No-"

"Like a smiling old woman who wants to get along with everyone and speaks with two tongues. What are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid. I-"

"Of course you are afraid. Have you forgotten your principles? Call it religion or whatever - but a man must have principles and stand by them. Why are we workers in such a bad state as we are at this moment? Because we are afraid. What are we afraid of? Losing our souls? But what joy do I have in my soul - if I live as we do?" thundered the Bear.

The workers at the neighboring tables listened breathlessly. Some of the older ones were thoughtful and serious, the others were politely amused. But the young ones seemed mostly indecisive and grinned expectantly.

The Bear was on comfortable ground. He suddenly turned in my direction and held out two large paws, their tanned palms in the air. "Look at these!" His booming voice echoed in the cramped, semi-dark trattoria. "They work in a factory. We make paper. A big company. These hands chop the straw that is mixed into the pulp. They earn twenty-two thousand lire a month. I am married, have two children. My 'home'" - he drew on the word ironically - "consists of a single room, a pigsty. No water, no amenities, poor lighting. And I pay five thousand lire in rent every month. Come here and talk about propaganda and enthusiasm at work! Look, look at these walruses. They are my enthusiasm. SA PERCHE SONO COMUNISTO..." He sat back heavily in his chair and let his blazing, reckless gaze wander over his comrades.

"Siame comunisti, noi anche", Guide quickly interjected.

"Aren't you excommunicated by the Church?" I asked.

"Yes, but if the Church doesn't know for sure...", whispered the man with the peaked cap.

"Some of us are outcasts", said the Bear. "They miss out on weddings and baptisms and funerals. But that's the women's business, we men have other things to think about. Life is too short." He pulled out a banknote and unfolded it rustlingly. "Look here," he said, pointing to the watermark. "A woman - una donna. With a double face." He turned

the banknote over. “Just like you, Guido. What are you afraid of - me perhaps?” He laughed noisily and fanned the banknote. “Five thousand lire. A week’s pay. We have payday today, and now we are drinking. Padrone! A bottle of ill!”

These experiences in noisy, smoky trattorias aroused many conflicting emotions within me. They were more stimulating than wine, more convincing than words. At times I was filled with the happiest expectations. But then the mood could change, weighed down by uncertainty and foreboding. And between these extremes life walked its perilous balance.

The workers were difficult to fathom in their apparent uniformity. Politically they belonged to the same party. They shared work and poverty and the small variations that external events could bring in both cases. Some were powerful and energetic like the Bear and almost always passionately violent under a surface of playful irony. Their optimistic impatience affected the others in waves of intense emotion, barely bridged by primitive logic.

The man in the big cap was called Paolo. The eyes in his rodent face were small, dark and very mobile. But there was no relationship between the mobility of the eyes and his intelligence which was undeveloped. Paolo and the rickety, hollow-cheeked Guido were often together. They only asked me where I had been and what I had seen on my travels. They were eloquent and I listened willingly, so everything went smoothly. They were curious about other countries. The curiosity was naive and personal, a desire to compare life in other places with the life they themselves lived. America was inevitably brought up. No one could deny the high standard of living in the United States - they admitted that reluctantly. Guido was sure that it was because of the wars - the United States had profited from wars. At the moment there were millions of unemployed over there. Millions, Guido insisted. And for that reason the United States must start a war again. Il capitalismo vuole fare la guerra. But...” and he pointed with a bony index finger, “there will be no war. The people of Europe do not want to fight.” He tried in vain to appear convincing.

Paolo wanted me to see the Villa d'Este. His "bellissimo" on top of so many others could have been too much. But it wasn't. It came straight from the heart, spontaneous, sincere and absolutely free from envy. Why envy something that doesn't belong to one's world? He and Guido were going to take me to La Villa. On Sunday. On ordinary days you have to pay an entrance fee. But on Sundays it was FREE.

They chattered with childish enthusiasm. Only when the Bear was nearby did they become quiet. Then they listened silently and nodded their approval to his defiant proclamation. They did it willingly and without artifice. They were carried away by the thunderous voice. And there was no question of submission.

One evening when the conversation had slowed down a bit, I invited the two friends to another trattoria, "for a glass of wine." We had already drunk a lot and talked about war and peace and reminded each other in vivid terms that all people are brothers. We trudged a little way in the dark through streets filled with the sound of rushing traffic. On the way, Guido said: "We are all brothers, all people are brothers." And Paolo was like an echo in the darkness: "Yes, of course we are brothers. There should be no enmity and war..."

As we sat on benches in a secluded wine tavern, they repeated once again that people must be like brothers and live in peace.

"You and I and Paolo," Guido said solemnly, "we are people. Paolo and I are communists. You..." he shrugged his shoulders and grimaced, "you may not be a communist. But still we are all the same, we have the same needs. We drink our wine like this... and there are no differences between us." He raised his glass.

"Yes," said Paolo. "If all people could drink together, there would never be war."

We sat in silence for a while in the pleasant warmth of the wine, and the lamp spread its red glow on the low beamed ceiling. A different kind of warmth radiated from the stove in a corner of the neat, sparsely furnished room. A girl came in and pulled a round flat loaf of bread out of an opening in the wide chimney with an oven rake and gave it to a man who was eating soup. At the table next to ours, four men were

playing cards. They were very few in number. Suddenly two of them gave up the game and crumpled their clothes.

Guido began again with sweeping gestures to explain what he thought of the church and Christ as the first socialist. But he was too dramatic and sloppy, his words tripped over each other and even Paolo was inattentive.

"You know, signore," he said softly. He put his hand in his pocket, pulled out a strap with a watch case attached and unbuttoned it. The case contained a small photograph. "A great man," he said.

Guido had an exactly similar medallion. He showed it to me under the table. "Un grand'uomo," he said. "We are saved with such a leader!"

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Through the window that looked out onto the river I stared out into the sparkling night. The lights around the circus tents on the shore shimmered like pearls through the vines and the shadowy ghosts of the mountains lay lost in sleep under the star-strewn roof of the sky. A cold wind blew from the invisible olive groves and the dark river, the circus tents spread their unrest and the murmur under the bridge was its whispering accompaniment.

On a night like this one should be in the mountains. Not among low mountains like these, no, rather in some lonely place in the Abruzzo or the Swedish mountains... I wanted to leave Guido and Paolo and all the brotherhood behind - and I couldn't... There was something wonderful and at the same time terrifying in the thought of the two workers and their blind faith. "Siamo comunisti" - they were communists. They were uneducated, lacking political judgment and really knew nothing about the party and its plans or chances for success.

And they were religious - more or less. They had abandoned the safe haven of the church - but in great haste; they still looked back to see if they had left behind anything indispensable. They had. The hopes they

had cherished in the past were worn out. But their former hope was no longer enough for them. Life had distanced them from the supernatural, drawn them into the present - and driven them on in search of a life-giving hope. Continuous doubt was incompatible with their nature. And reality - the tangible and present - posed problems that could not be solved except in the form of an idea that was more real than reality itself. Like ships adrift, Guido and Paolo had moved aimlessly in the direction of something that could give them strength to wait and work in the merciless little world that was theirs.

And what had they found?

A proclamation.

The same relationship that had once brought them into the bosom of the Church had, paradoxically, freed them from its grip and carried them on toward this proclamation - which was a promise.

The wonderful and strange and terrible thing about Paolo and Guido was that they believed this proclamation.

And I thought once more of the French. Doubt - and what is worse - cynicism was the French attitude to life. They did not do a thing because it served a higher purpose but because at the moment of action it justified itself. The French were on the whole much better informed about economic conditions and the affairs of the world in general, they knew alas much more about psychology than the Italians. Hence their skepticism. The world had taught the French to distrust.

Was it because they knew very little and had even less that Guido and Paolo had such faith in the Word? Were they fully devoted to the cause or merely followers because of circumstances? Would they, if a storm broke, seek the safe haven of the church?

A man they had never seen and probably never would see gave them hope and confidence in the medallion. And another man stirred them up, carried them away until the goal of their hopes seemed very close. Guido and Paolo knew what they were fighting against - their daily lives were a harsh reminder of this.

But were they equally sure of what they stood for?

"Brotherhood... Peace..."

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"Do you think the Italians are stupid?" asked the Bear. We sat in the usual place in the company of Paolo and Guido and a plump man in wrinkled clothes whom I had never met before.

"Stupid? How so?" I replied. "Not at all. There is a difference between intelligence and education. Many of you are uneducated but very intelligent. You have quick perception and can reason..."

The bear nodded. "That is exactly what is needed in our situation - the ability to reason. I am uneducated myself. Only a couple of years in elementary school. There were nine of us, I am the seventh. We were poor. Nothing to eat. No bedding. When I was fifteen, a man came and took me away to work. He had papers on it, an order. I had to work for Il Signore. Pure starvation wages. And I began to observe the life around me. Life taught me a lot. Sono comunisto per forza." The bear was clean-shaven, dressed in a white shirt, with a tie that matched his blue-gray jacket. He was his usual neat self. Not flashy but neat. Compared to him, Guido and Paolo seemed miserably shabby. The newcomer was called Claudio. He was swarthy, with a pointed chin and a blue stubble, matted eyebrows, alert, mature eyes. The corners of his mouth hung down gloomily. And his eyes were sullen even when he was attentive.

I found a piece of sketch paper in his pocket and asked if they manufactured CARTA of that kind in Tivoli.

"Say," grumbled the Bear, thumbing it. "No, no. We don't have such nice things here. We make wrapping paper" - and he made a sour face - "cheap crap. This paper is better than the one our money is printed on." And he laughed his deep, rumbling laugh. Then he added seriously: "Recently we had a foreign cellulose expert visit the factory. From Scandinavia. From Finland, I think it was. He said that the great fault of the Italian workers was their disunity. Do you think he's right?"

"If I knew," I said. "There is so much that is not right in Italy, so

many differences of opinion, even among the workers. But of course you must be united, I mean you have common problems - low incomes, bad working conditions, disorganization."

"Exactly!" growled the Bear. "As long as we live in misery, we must be united in our poverty. It is simple and clear."

"You understand, signore," Guido interjected, floating into a broad survey of the workers of the world and their common aspirations. His mobile face changed expression a dozen times, he tilted his head this way and that, and his eyes rolled like balls in their deep sockets. "The workers of all countries have the right to live as human beings - in peace and quiet. The ideal of communism is universal, and... "

"You with your phrases," thundered the Bear, flapping his hands. "Always the same world politics and high-flown snowballs. Can't you use words that live? Communism! Someone should beat the word into your head so you finally understand what it's all about!"

"Guido and Paolo are idealists," I said - and regretted it at the same moment; I had singled them out for their noisy chatter.

"And what is an idealist, if I may ask?" roared the Bear. "An impractical optimist! I am practical, I..."

"So are Guido and Paolo," said Claudio, who thus opened his mouth for the first time in the company. "They are more socially minded than you, that's all." And he turned directly to the Bear. "Their personal idealism is basically nothing other than social materialism."

The others frowned, trying to grasp the meaning of his words. "Claudio is a learned man," the Bear grinned and winked at me. And he raised his voice again. "Unity is the word! Why are we not united? The worker is worth his wages. There are people in Italy who have no more than three hundred and eighty lire a day for -."

"Not so little..." Paolo protested.

"True my words! And every day they have to trudge several kilometers to their workplace!"

"But if the unemployment benefit granted by the government is five hundred lire..." I wondered.

"Never mind!" snorted the Bear. "A farm worker somewhere in the

south knows only his signore and the land he tills. To get compensation, as you call it, he must first prove that he is unemployed. But there is 'work' for him with the gentlemen, and a roof over his head. And where is he going to go?"

Paolo caught my eye and spread his hands in an apologetic gesture. He always followed his comrades' reasoning a little behind, his slow comprehension struggling to associate them with a truth that was hardly less vague and indefinite. Eventually he gave up the attempt and let himself be guided by the Bear's will. Saying yes felt like a relief to him. It saved him the trouble of thinking. If it came down to it, he would blindly obey the hot-tempered and reckless Bear.

"In Tivoli we have a factory that produces car tires that cost a hundred thousand lire a piece," continued the Bear. "Centomoli lire! The worker earns a thousand lire a day. Is that fair?" He raised his voice. "No! Can people in that position disagree? No." He roared uninhibitedly and glared around him with feigned rage. Although his young eyes sparkled with indignation, they were completely devoid of hatred and revenge.

"But in that case ... why aren't there more communists among you?"

"More? How so? Almost all the workers in Tivoli are communists."

"The city has a communist government," added Guido delightedly.

"No, not Tivoli, I'm talking about Italy as such."

"Because there aren't enough strong men. There are a lot of tail-waggers with no sense of poise."

"People are afraid," said Guide with an important air, as if it were a matter of strictly confidential information.

"More than that," growled the Bear. "They lack principles. Everyone is closest to themselves. People take the first bait. For example, a monarchist businessman imagines to them that they will become partners in the company if the monarchist party wins. Can you imagine - partners! And they blindly believe him. Oh yes, they will become millionaires, the whole bunch. Monarchists! Ah. And the fascists - they will do this or that. Just like before the war. Good times, glorious times. And the same great COMBINAZIONE that is steering the country straight

into war again. If you promise those people that they will come to paradise tomorrow, they will vote for you."

But what can you expect from them? I wondered. They are looking for a way out. It is in their nature to look for a convenient way out. God or the Signor or a party that has not been defeated too often - the short way out. Is the Bear more rational than the others - or just less patient? He would add his one plus one, on his own, even if it meant that a lot of respectable chattels were smashed in the rush. I contented myself with asking: "Isn't it difficult for you to know what is feasible and what is not? After all, you have no guarantees..."

"Guarantees!" roared Björnen, slamming his fist on the rickety table with a bang. "Everyone should have guarantees. Everyone expects someone else to provide guarantees - and fulfill them at the same time!"

"Yes," I quickly interjected, "people seem to be waiting for someone to step forward and do something."

"Our communist leaders will do it," said Guido. "They know what should be done and when it should be done." Even he was influenced by Björn's willpower. But while Paolo, after a moment's thought, had completely surrendered and ceased to think, Guido's brain continued to work in its indirect way. The deep-set eyes in his expressive face gleamed cunningly and calculatingly.

They were a little timid in their consent. And at the bottom lurked his personal satisfaction. The small glimmer indicated that Guido reserved a secret pleasure for himself. I suspected that Guido had the same look in the church. Would he follow the Bear if there was a revolution? He certainly would.

"But where are the men, the fearless men who dare to join us?" asked the Bear. "What can be done with pitiful weaklings of the kind you meet everywhere these days? Nothing. They can stay where they are and continue to listen to empty promises. We can do it ourselves. No one helps those who don't help themselves."

"As true as it was said!" Paolo exclaimed, and the wide-brimmed hat nodded over his rodent face.

"Yes," agreed Guido thoughtfully.

Only Claudio - sad and depressed as if a thought had distanced him from his friends - showed no signs of agreement.

The conversation began to turn to Sweden, Svezia, said Björnen dryly. It is the stronghold of capitalism in Europe. Then he asked, completely irrelevantly, whether it was true that women in Sweden gave birth to children until they were sixty years old. I expressed my doubts. But, Björnen pointed out, Swedish women over forty are much better preserved than Italians. It was obviously the climate that kept them so youthful. "When our women have turned forty and have nine or ten children..." and he drew a jagged outline in the air - "finito!" He burst into laughter and puffed out his broad chest: "The Italian men, on the other hand..."

As for the Germans... if he were German he would never dare to show himself in Italy. No honest Italian could tolerate the Germans after all they had done here. Tedesce! He spat.

The Bear had a personal attitude towards America. Life over there was far from being as utopian as some people imagined. They read illustrated magazines and watched Hollywood films and thought - that's what America is. But there they were wrong - the United States was not like that, quite the opposite. Who shot the films and printed the magazines? Wealthy people with private interests to protect. Would they tell the truth about how the American worker really lived? Never in his life! And anyway - he turned the corner - even if the worker in the United States was materially well-off, he was still not happy. No. Not deep down. His happiness was superficial. The world did not interest him. He cared only for pleasure. It was an illusion of happiness, nothing more. How could a man be happy if he were only interested in his own self?

Despite his white shirt and tie and well-fitting jacket, the Bear was primitive and simple-minded. With his rough, optimistic logic he was ready to dispute any calculations, anything beyond his own addition. He was by no means vengeful, he resented the miserable conditions in which he was forced to live - but he hated no one. This freedom from hatred came from the heart. It made him uncomplicatedly good. And it

helped him to accept ideas so bold that his. mind could not consciously grasp them. He laughed at the idealists. He knew no "new concepts". For him everything was tangible, tangible, present and self-evident. He intended to act accordingly.

Who authorizes him?

The heart. The heart has power and authority.

The heart has room for much that the mind cannot contain. The best thing about the Bear was his heart. Even his primitive reasoning had its origin deep down there. He had escaped the cunning, calculation and skeptical reserve that comes from past political intrigues and miscalculations. One and one made two because it HAD to be so, not because it should be so. With this word "must" he went noisily to battle against the flawed logic of necessity. His optimism was contagious. He had energy to spare - he would have had more than enough of that commodity as long as necessity was a fact.

Who would teach him how to better use his energy?

Day in and day out one is reminded of it: the Italian people are waiting for a leader. The Italians' alleged self-confidence is just an attitude. They talk widely about reforming society - without having any idea what the changes would lead to.

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On the ground floor of the house where I lived there was a small eatery, a ristorante. What made it a ristorante and not a trattoria only the host knew. At most, he was a large, corpulent person who rarely smiled. He wasted a lot of time standing outside his restaurant with a dirty apron over his voluminous belly, watching the street life. He was apparently quite uninterested in what he saw. And he showed the same indifference to everything and everyone except the men who regularly ate and drank and played cards in his ristorante.

I ate there once. When I entered the dining room, it was empty. But

il padrone was setting a long table for twelve people. "A small gathering," he said. And he added that there was still plenty of time, which was a nice hint that I had to leave the restaurant when the other guests arrived. He was not rude, just grumpy. I made the mistake of asking how much a portion of soup and an omelet would cost. After this intrusion, il padrone glanced at the wall clock every time he brought something in for the long table. He served me with a look of disapproval and swept away the plates and dishes before I had finished. The food was excellent and not very expensive. But it was no pleasure to devour it like that.

Then the expected dinner guests began to pour in. Most of them were shopkeepers and small business owners. They seemed to like good food. The short signore who owned the house was one of them. Neither his tight gray suit nor the cap that sat cockily over one eye could prevent him from appearing extremely simple-minded. He probably had to remind himself every morning that his jacket had to be buttoned and his tie tied. But once it was done, he thought himself a respectable person, a gentleman. Which he was - in his confident and impudent way.

Like the cellar master, il signore was indifferent to a lot of things. On his house hung a sign - ALLOGIO. If anyone wanted to rent a room, so much the better. If not - he shrugged - it didn't matter. It wasn't tourist season. In the summer the rooms were always occupied. A few hundred lire more or less was nothing to be concerned about - he wanted you to understand that.

Being a gentleman, he was polite. When I met him in the street one day and said hello, he stopped to talk to me. "Belle paese, jaha. Antica!" He had a red-flowered face, a galosh chin and close-set eyes. With his hands in his pockets he stood there, rocking on his heels, his cap carelessly on three-quarters and a toothpick dangling between his thick lips.

"Belle, ma - triste", I said. "Poor ..." And I mentioned something about the workers.

Il signore raised his eyebrows. "Ah cossi, cossi", he said. "They're not very rich - but they manage. They have work here, l'industria."

"But aren't they pretty awful to live in, all these rascals?"

"The houses are not comfortable, admittedly," he agreed. "Some cannot be repaired at all. Le Bell'Arte will in due course restore some of the oldest as architectural monuments. Le Bell'Arte is an institution that preserves Italy's historical buildings and art treasures for posterity. Tivoli is recovering from the war. A lot is being done to develop industry. That factory ..." and he nodded towards a cube on the other side of the river, " ... is new. Ultramodern. All the machinery comes from Germany. The government is also helping with the reconstruction. Several apartment buildings are already finished."

I brought up the high rents.

Il signore frowned. He was on his guard despite his carefree self-confidence. Yes, it was true that some workers could not pay their rent. The construction costs were high; the rents must therefore also be high - unfortunately. On the other hand, there were workers who could but did not want to pay. They preferred to stay where they were and save money. "There you have some of them..." and il signore pointed with the tip of his chin at the people who were tramping by. "They look poor, they are poorly dressed. But look at them on Sundays - everything is brand new from head to toe ..." And he gestured to his tattered jacket. "At home they have everything they need. But of course there are great contrasts here, there always are in factory towns like Tivoli. L'industria. Changes. People of different professions and skills. On the whole we don't have that much misery..."

Il signore was still polite - but not so indifferent. His indifference had turned into an impersonal hostility. It was time to talk about the weather. The weather is a neutral topic of conversation in Tivoli. On certain occasions.

Il padrone in his dirty apron appeared in the dining room and began a conversation with the landlord. Together they seemed twice as shabby. But they did not know it. They looked up and down the street, indifferent and yet concerned. Their indifference was veiled vigilance.

They had their friends, their customers, their own small minority of signori and padroni. They could afford to avoid people they wished

to avoid. And the others avoided them. Avoided - but did not ignore them.

In the street a priest was busy distributing church pamphlets to passing women. He was excessively polite, he bowed and smiled and nodded. The women did not seem so obviously pleased. A workers in greasy clothes took a detour around the church and glared slyly at the black coat.

On the bridge railing someone has painted in bold capitals: "DEMOCRATI CHRISTIANI = GUERRA.

The Communist Party has its local headquarters in a house not far from the piazza and a church.

The truly significant boundary lines of our time are ideological. The basic conflict is between the haves and the have-nots. But what you feel most strongly in a city like Tivoli is the discord between people. The conflict divides parties, turns friends into enemies there, weakens family ties - and changes the character of individuals.

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I climbed the mountain that I had so often viewed from my window. The path led straight up at first, then bit its tail and continued in a spiral up a ledge of the mountain. The city sank away and disappeared from sight, before me spread slopes beyond slopes and deep down on the left hand the leafy tunnels of the ravine and the yellow ribbons of the river. In Italy it is the water that makes the big difference, I realized. High up there the landscape was dry clay and thin bushes, bare sun-burnt hills, by no means forgotten but completely unusable. Far below the fertile fields undulated and the water, endless masses of water. If only they could lead it up here, build pipelines ... I tried to imagine the slopes around Tivoli as green terraces similar to those you see in Sicily. The Sicilian peasants fought heroically to build and maintain a few poor hectares of topsoil on the mountain slopes. They quarried stone

and built terrace shelves in the steeps and dragged the precious soil up the mountain. No wonder they loved their green hanging gardens. Wouldn't the hills around Tivoli be more easily tamed with water so close at hand? ... But why deny that their nakedness had its own charm. A melancholy charm.

A woman and two children came towards me on the footpath with their heavy sheaves of rice. The woman was bent and withered like the rice she carried. She balanced the awkward burden on her head and supported it with one hand and trudged carefully down the sharp stones, bent with the effort. The children, a boy and a girl, also carried their sheaves, but they were more sure-footed than she was and chattered eagerly among themselves. They probably had to walk a long way for fuel, perhaps to the mountain beyond this? It was a quarter of a mile, at the very least. And I thought of the dilapidated houses; cold and damp in summer, cold and wet in winter.

Deep below me a train with flashing windows came, turned onto the viaduct to the left and dived into a hole in the side of the mountain. The next moment it ran out again like a red and silver snake and slithered around a gray slope in the distance. Even further away in the same direction the Roman campagna was visible. Two round hills seemed to float on the hazy, trembling horizon. Each had its own village like a skullcap on its crest. They rested diffusely, colorless and drowsy in the midday mist.

A group of boys caught up with me on the road. It was a large group of sporty young people. The older ones marched in the lead, pedaling quickly in breeches and short-sleeved shirts. They had strong brown legs and well-developed chests, and their teeth gleamed white as they laughed and talked to each other. The smaller boys formed the rearguard, eagerly crowding around a young priest. In his effeminate black caftan, he tried bravely to climb as fast as the others. He had taken off his priest's hat and was carrying it in his hand along with his upraised caftan. The little boys bombarded him with questions. He answered curtly but cheerfully, stopping now and then to wipe the sweat from his forehead. The gang of boys continued straight ahead to a hut on a

ledge of the mountain. I took off in the opposite direction, still going up. Here and there, sparse tufts of thin grass grew and the ground was strewn with loose, flat stones that looked like slate. On one of the stones sat a brown butterfly, my shadow touched it - and the next moment it rose into the air, staggering through the air. High above in the powdery blue sky, two kites sailed unsteadily into the sun. And at the other end of the world, down among the olive trees, a car sped along the winding road like a beetle chasing a snail's shimmering tracks.

I reached the top. There stood the cross with its black iron arms pointing north and south. Next to it were two boys busily feeding more thread to the kites. A third boy was thawing out. They were clean-washed, neat schoolboys. They were talking excitedly and looking for their kites. Over the mountain next door swayed red and green rectangles, waving their long tails.

The wind was damp and sickening. The whole landscape seemed to be steaming. I sat down on a tuft of grass, which was already as flat as a sofa cushion, and looked out over the river and the city. Tivoli seemed so delicate and fragile on its low hill below. A conglomerate of mortar and brick and stone, with little black spots crawling around or standing still and waiting - and no point in it. All of it completely pointless.

So I thought: Pointless and yet so full of conflicting opinions.

Tivoli was a perfectly ordinary Italian town. A city where the local authorities were tied hand and foot, the workers impoverished and the children without a future.

But there were so many lives in Tivoli, and each life was meaningful. The blacksmith, Guido and Paolo, the Bear and many others - all lived down there, busy with their daily struggle which was a real and compelling necessity. In some parts of this country people could only wait. In Tivoli they could both wait and work.

But they had terrible handicaps. The daily struggle consumed them completely, deprived them of time and knowledge and the benefits that these can bestow. Their lives were wasted in fruitless toil.

On the other hand, a life without struggle and effort is very empty. We organize societies with Security as the only guiding light and

society engulfs us, we are wiped out by sheer security. Life becomes easy and superficial. You own a lot of things and have fun and everything works perfectly. Too perfect. Inhuman. Life has ceased to be a creation of brain and heart working in harmony. Security is a pleasant utility, but it does not mean progression. And life without progress is a most sorrowful thing. And then we try to overcome boredom and rediscover our true selves. We turn against the society that is without a soul. We get drunk on hell, we cheat for the sake of cheating - to counteract the deep disappointment that a boring and heartless society prepares for us. And we cannot blame this irony of fate on the machines - no matter how hard we try.

Why must man waver between extremes? Why must we choose between Security with a capital T and a life wasted in a vain struggle for survival? Is it perhaps due to the inherent crookedness of human nature?

The world is overflowing with injustice and lies, a city like Tivoli is a good reminder of this relationship. People who have Security and plenty of leisure often live empty, selfish, and mean lives. They let their workers starve, neglect their poets, and squander their fortunes on whores. Their arrogance and cunning are called - success. Society envies them...

Or, to put it more accurately: Certain kinds of society envy them. For the world also strives for truth and justice - you can see that in Tivoli too. Good, brave, and nameless people wait and work. They are brave. and noble not in spite of, but often because of, their way of life. Their lives are spent in uncertainty and hardship. But they persevere with hope and determination and a kind of awkward generosity. They believe that better times will soon come for them and their children - and they themselves want to make sure that it will not be too long...

Tivoli could seem meaningless and torn apart by contradictions. Tivoli was fatigue and bitterness and purposelessness. But Tivoli was also optimism and humor and tenacious strength. And the people possessed the energy of the sun - the power that could transform the hard struggle for existence into a triumph of human life.

Better times ... soon ... Would it really happen? And if it did one day became reality - in what forms would all the new things come to Tivoli?

Something rustled above my head. One of the boys hauled in his kite. It swayed down and collapsed at his feet. In one corner of it, the white silhouette of a bird was outlined, in the other corner - a cross. And something was wrong with the thread. The boys consulted among themselves. The third - a lanky and freckled boy - tied his still flying kite to the iron cross and came to the rescue. A loud discussion followed. And then it was done. One boy ran a few steps and threw the kite into the air. Then he hurried back to his comrades. And the kite filled with wind and sailed up and up.

"You have shorter string than I do," said the lanky boy.

"Yes, but I'll get myself a whole spool, two thousand meters," said the other. "So high it will fly..."

Directly below us lay the railway station. The tracks ran like fine silver threads and branched off to a railway yard at the water's edge. The river was dammed, wide and sluggish. And on the opposite bank were a few sparse rafts of timber, no bigger than matches in a gutter.

I took the slippery path and quickly turned down the path on the northern slope of the mountain. Then I continued along the side ledge past the small sports cabin above the viaduct. It was a very difficult walk, the slope was strewn with loose stones. And I myself came down bouncing like a rolling stone in long jumps over the green snares.

A single-span coach with fiery yellow wheels had stopped on the country road. The driver wore a shiny brass badge in his cap. A lady and a gentleman, city dwellers by all accounts, well-dressed and very Italian, were sitting in the back seat. When the driver with the whip pointed to the view of Tivoli, they nodded in agreement and leaned forward. Then the cart rattled away to the next bend and the next view.

The calming wind lazily lifted the smoke from the tall factory chimneys on the outskirts of the city. A scooter came whining through an arch in the viaduct, cleared the curve by a hair and whizzed on impatiently. It must be fast and it must go fast. It is the Italians' newest

pleasure. To move from one place to another - in a flash. The fact that you have nothing to do when you arrive is irrelevant. The main thing is to get there RAPIDO.

A short distance from Tivoli I stopped, leaning against the guardrail by the ravine, and looked down into the green steaming cauldron. The water plunged sparkling white in the frozen twilight. The cypresses were like black flames of night, unreal. On the steep slope above, the shadowy city wall seemed to be teetering on the brink of a dark disaster. But high in the clear evening sky, the mountain ridges shone with a warm and rosy glow.

The carnival was in full swing. Light, color and noise in a kaleidoscopic whirl. Sparks rained down in the tent where the radio cars were jostled and jostled. The drivers were always boys, the passengers girls. They sat packed like herrings in the cramped tin boxes, the boys spinning violently on the steering wheel and the girls screaming and giggling when two cars met with a crash. A few bold freeloaders drove alone, coldly intent on as many collisions as possible. People stood around the platform and watched. They were mostly young men, freshly shaved, pomaded and with a good eye for the weaker sex. But there was almost no flirting. The young men stuck together and seemed to almost avoid the girls, who formed an equally strictly defined group. In the twilight outside the circle of lanterns, the local mischief-makers hung around with their hands in their trouser pockets.

Around the row of tents with the radio cars there were games of chance and market stalls selling cheap swag. And a carousel. There was a swarm of little boys between the stalls. They threw themselves under the rotating wooden horses with lightning speed and lay hidden there. A thin gypsy with a razor-sharp face did his best to keep the stowaways away. But his best was not good enough, the unshakable RAGGAZI were too fast. A young married couple came walking with their little daughter. The husband was red-faced and rough-limbed, the wife plump and painful with well-groomed, shiny hair. Their figlia wanted to ride the carousel. The wooden horses slowed down and stopped, and her father helped her into the saddle. Then she rode alone and quite

touchingly on a white pony. She clung to its neck, anxious and happy. The mother smiled, the father made a funny face, the little boys eeled around the tent like Bedouins and the gypsy flapped his arms and tried to make himself heard over the canned music and the clatter of the radio cars.

Behind all the lamps and candles the common lay sunk in darkness and the river gleamed like a night-black blade. Caravans and merry-go-round horses were silhouetted against the water's surface - like moving shadows.

The street up to town pulsed with heavy traffic - cars, scooters and flausers. At the bridgehead was a small patch of benches under the laurel trees. There, the old men sat two and three together, talking and puffing on their pipes and watching the stream of people drifting by.

The atmosphere was at once cheerful and warmly natural and yet melancholy. It felt as if joy and sorrow had embraced each other somewhere in the night.

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I had almost made it home when someone called my name on the street. A large, stocky figure stepped out of the darkness. It was Claudio. His greeting had been eager and a little forced, a plea for attention. He began by awkwardly apologizing for the night before. He was probably interested in discussing labor issues and politics, but ... " The shoulders rose and sagged. "What can we say other than that there is very little hope?"

In any case, he had something on his mind; it was something he wanted to tell me alone. In the dim light from the lamp across the street, his face took on an expression of deep melancholy. I felt more than saw the sad, searching eyes that sought my gaze.

"I have been to Rome today," said Claudio, "to look for work."

"But - don't you have a job here, in Tivoli?"

Claudio nodded. "Yes, I work in a factory. But... you see... I have an

academic degree...” He stammered a little, tormented and embarrassed. Then he explained: He had studied political science and foreign policy. His voice became steadier, he was proud in his misery.
I remembered how the Bear had teased Claudio because of his education. And I was angry with him for ridiculing a man like Claudio. “Did you find anything suitable?” I asked.

“No, nothing -”

“But how can that be? A man with your qualifications in today’s Italy?”

“Life in today’s Italy is not as it should be,” he replied. “Not for someone who is a communist...” and he shrugged his shoulders again slightly. “You have no chances, no future. If you dare to be outspoken in the factory, you get fired. And the possibilities of finding a place in business or in government service ... “

A motorcycle rushed past like an avalanche of rattling tin cans.

“Do you think the situation will improve?,,

“No. We are about three million party members. That is too few. We have been blacklisted and are being banned from a lot of jobs. The farm workers are being warned not to attend our meetings. We are being threatened with unemployment . . . Reprisals . . . It will be desperately difficult to live in Italy. The right has decided to crush the left once and for all.”

“Can it happen?”

“Who knows. In the long run it probably won’t work. But what does it matter fundamentally if we have to live as we do.” Claudio fell silent and kicked a piece of paper onto the curb. “It may be a question of perseverance. One can tell oneself that communism is inevitable - and organize one’s life accordingly. The world is moving towards communism - or at any rate away from capitalism. For some people this is enough. They tell themselves that il comunismo will soon triumph. But - they don’t know. They don’t pause to think. They have no idea how bewildering and diabolical the conspiracy against communism really is... “ The words died away. He sank like a haystack in the rain. He stood there, limp and hunched over in his baggy suit, changing his feet

and staring down into the street.

I shivered, there was frost in the air.

"Your friends say that Il Partito will conquer all difficulties," I said at random.

Claudio's answer was a shake of his head. "They say so. They want to believe it so much. And some do. I envy them. I often tell myself that the happiest people are those who can believe in an idea and draw their strength from it and wait and be ready when their hour strikes. That is the true revolutionary spirit - even if it is a little timid and hesitant with us in Italy. But then I reflect on what is really happening. I realize that there will be no revolution, that we will not even win a decisive electoral victory - not for a very long time. People have not thought things through properly. Italians follow the voice of their blood, not their intellect. It is easier to incite us for a cause like Trieste than to convince us of the need for general education. No. There will be nothing but unrest, this eternal chaos..."

I shivered in the evening chill. For some people, lack of knowledge is a shield against the blows of life. For others, knowledge means increased confidence. But for Claudio it was a cause of despair.

"It must be difficult to live if you think like you," I said.

"Waiting is the worst," he replied. "You can be a revolutionary and sleep with a gun hidden in the mattress if you know that you will soon be allowed to shoot. But to lie on an empty stomach on the blessed gun and not be sure that you will ever be able to use it - that is much more difficult. There are people who have done it and who are still doing it. But we Italians are not capable of unity and patience. We do not have a strong enough character. We don't think through the problems. That's why no lofty ideals have ever had a chance to gain a lasting hold on us - I mean all Italians. Look at how easily people change parties. And notice what role self-interest plays in the whole thing. It's due to fatigue and doubt. It's the consequences of waiting. And we who wanted to work, to organize..."

He paused and rubbed his chin. Then he continued slowly:
"On the surface you see only irritation and party squabbles and strikes

and political bargaining - the old routine. But think how stuck-up all Italians are, how this terrible scumbag is ruining our lives... And how little we can do..."

"But there must be a solution, a way out," I said.

"There would be a way out," Claudio replied, "if we were allowed to decide. Unfortunately..." And he shrugged fatalistically. "Unfortunately, it's not us who decide. And it's not just Italy. The whole world is involved, two worlds if you will. Two incompatible systems. And what do we really mean in the struggle for world domination? When I talk about the struggle for power, you think of Russia and America. But think also of the Vatican - of the five hundred million believers, of its empire. The Catholic Church is ambitious. It has set itself the task of exterminating us everywhere, but especially in Italy where we are leading by "bad example". Since the Church has nothing better to offer, no deep foundations of logic and truth, it must fight communism with fear as a weapon. That is why it continues to boast about the communist threat and claims that it is greater than ever, let alone more insidious than before. The Church uses all weapons, including mortal sin, to keep the people under its sway. Well, there may be setbacks. All Italian communists are by no means unreservedly pro-Russian. But the exaggerated, insidious anti-Russian propaganda may one day make us bitterly pro-Russian. Why not, really? We do not feel any Russian threat, but we experience persecution from the Church. Is that a paradox? Perhaps it is. There are so many paradoxes in this now. The Church that calls itself the guardian of peace would be the loser if peace were to come true. There is so much injustice in the world. Nothing but fear and tension and hatred..."

Scattered notes drifted through the frosty air, languid fragments of melody faded into the indigo-blue night. Half-blurred shadowy figures moved between the dark houses or were suddenly outlined in sharp outline under the lanterns. One voice said "A domani", another replied "chao". A door closed with a loud bang.

"Suppose the situation changes and Italy gets a chance to look over its house - on its own. What will happen then?" I asked.

"Hard to say. Something extreme, probably. A strong man, a new Duce. Rhetoric and flying flags and riots and marches here and there ... strong nationalism. Reactionary or radical, it makes no difference. Ultra-Italian it will be anyway. It would be the natural consequence of many years of hesitation and postponement and double-dealing. A change at any price. If the Communists could do it? No, I don't think so. We are not nationalistic enough, I mean that the Party has too strong an internationalist color. And it never gives up... My comrades are afraid of great upheavals. But I wonder... Optimism is good until one has to live on it alone. The future is a promise, a stimulating promise - until one tries to find someone who can fulfill it. We will always have lived 'today' with disappointment and disappointment."

I had wanted to contradict Claudio, to give him a compliment, to set up a positive truth against his hopelessness. But I could not find the words. I was shivering with cold, my brain was as if paralyzed.

Claudio continued: "Life is merciless. One is forced to go. to extremes and hates himself. One tries all means. .. and so ... " He shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands in a gesture of complete, final hopelessness. He stood silent for a moment, a tall figure, slightly bent under the weight of defeat, and so lost, discouraged and hopelessly defeated.

And so we must say goodbye...

I had trouble with the door key, it wouldn't turn. I already thought I would have to ask il padrone for help - and tried once more. Then the bolt reacted. On the stairs I could hear the restaurant guests laughing. I assumed they were sitting and playing cards at the round green table close to the board wall.

Then I went up the narrow, steep stairs to my room. The tiled floor resembled a pond of white ice floes on black water. I closed the window and muffled the last scratchy notes of a gypsy melody. Now that it was already too late, I thought that I should have invited Claudio to my room for a glass of wine. I looked for the bottle on the roughly made bedside table. It was empty. But I didn't feel like going out again. I crawled into bed and pulled the blankets up to my chin and lay there, watching the string of lanterns around the fairground. They gradu-

ally went out. I felt warm now, my body was warm and relaxed. And somewhere inside me an icy emptiness gaped. The night was still, the window a blue-black square in the dark cave of the room. I closed my eyes. I felt that the music had died down. But I could still hear a distant, elusive, sinister note - a human being's touching song.

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Rome. The gigantic, banging modern railway station of stone and glass. Crowds, muffled noise. In the middle of this chaos a frail and small old lady asks: "Where is the customs - la dogana?" A police constable, a porter and a young girl all point in the same direction - to the right. The lady thanks and nods and thanks and follows the instructions. But her newly acquired friends stop and follow her with their eyes to convince themselves that she has really understood. The lady hurries around the corner - and there is the customs - a large hall with two glass cages, each with its own eagerly obliging official. A policeman is stationed at the door. The lady walks up to him, he salutes and points with a theatrical flourish to one of the cages. There she hands the clerk a baggage receipt for a suitcase from Stockholm. Il doganiere glances at the note, takes a form and begins to write. He writes and writes and writes. The lady stands next to her. She is slender and refined. The brown linen suit is tasteful - but worn. She is probably not Swedish, I think.

Finally the clerk hands her the paper - please, 4:95 for two days' storage. She pays. He gestures towards the other glass cage. She takes her receipt and leaves. The other clerk examines it carefully, takes a new form and begins to write at a leisurely pace...

A desperate young man rushes into the office. He trembles with nervousness, turns to the police constable, turns to the lady, lifts his hat and asks if she would be so kind as to help him. He doesn't speak Italian... Neither does the lady, but the customs officer understands her

French. What can she do for the young man?

"I have to catch the London plane," he replies. "It's urgent, I have a suitcase here and..."

The old man in the luggage room digs out the suitcase. The handle is torn off. The Englishman is indignant.

"Don't blame customs," says the old man. "It's the railway..."

The Englishman doesn't discuss the matter . . . He points to a gray box on the shelf. "That's mine too." The box resembles a typewriter.

"What is it?" asks the customs officer.

"A new invention," the lady translates, "a device that this gentleman bought in New Zealand."

"What do you do with it?"

"It's used to check developed film..."

The customs officer has his doubts. "Open it," he says brusquely. The clerks have left their glass cabinets and are peering over his shoulder. Their faces reflect an embarrassed curiosity.

"As if it were an atomic bomb!" the Englishman snorts contemptuously. He opens the box and the clerks stare idiotically at the manikin and talk among themselves.

"Start the machine - show how it works."

The Englishman completely forgets his good manners. "Rude! Idiocy! ... What do those damned imbeciles know about such things?!" He explodes. His face is sickeningly red. "Tell them I'm late for my plane... Tell them... Please tell them... I've traveled across three, across four continents... I've been to North and South America, to Japan..."

A cheerful little song comes to mind:

"J'ai traverse l' Afrique... e,
et les deux Ameriques...,
J'ai visite la Chine et le Japon..."

I have to smile at the ridiculous association.

The Englishman frowns and turns back to the old lady. "Tell them," he implores, "tell them that this is the first time anyone has asked me to..."

But the customs officer is adamant. And the Englishman snatches

up the apparatus, starts winding the imaginary film strip, and mutters angrily to himself. The clerks make sensible faces and exchange wise comments. "That's enough..." says the customs officer. The Englishman grabs his luggage.

"Permesso, signore, a few small formalities..." Forms, receipts. The young man shrugs, scatters money around him in various glass cages, it's useless to reason. He raises his hat to the old lady one last time and rushes away with a "Thank you..."

Now the customs officers have scrambled back to the lady's suitcase. The clerk continues his slogging but stops and asks: "Your address in Rome, if I may ask?"

"That was the worst! What does my hotel have to do with the suitcase?"

"The regulations, signora. And it costs 17:20."

Now it's her turn to protest. "For what? Pourquoi? Perche?" she shouts. "I paid thirty-two kronor in Sweden for the transport from Stockholm to Rome..."

"Yes, but there are many borders in between - Germany, Switzerland..."

"And now you demand that I pay all these mysterious foreign fees to your Italian customs? I won't do that!" She has raised her voice a little. The customs officers raise theirs considerably more. They shout and wag their fingers wildly.

The telephone rings. The clerk turns around and picks up the receiver. He speaks, listens, absentmindedly leafs through a magazine. Five minutes pass. A few more minutes. The lady sighs audibly. The clerk hangs up the phone and repeats: "17 and 20, signora!"

She realizes that the battle is lost. "What... what corruption... such... perche?" she asks once more.

The customs officer giggles delightedly. The clerk shines like a sun - you can see that his teeth are weak. Then a splash passes through his drooping moustache and his mouth cracks into a broad smile.

"The lady shouldn't be sad," he chuckles, throws himself back in his

desk chair and laughs good-naturedly. "You don't give your lire to us. You give them to... la bella Italia... la molto bella Roma... Eh? Won't you shake my hand, signora?" And he stretches his furry paw through the hatch.

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I understood pretty quickly what it was about. To leave. When you are in Rome, you should walk.

So I walk. I go where my nose points. Everything is fascinating here. I tremble with fear of missing out on something wonderful. I burn with eagerness to immerse myself in the city's elusive atmosphere. I breathe until I become desperate in all silence.

The streets of Rome are short and confusing. The city reveals itself in sudden visions. For example, I follow a narrow via that trickles down from Piazza Esquilino. In the corner stands a dilapidated fruit stand, a rickety chair. On the chair sits the woman who sells watermelons. She is toothless and white-haired and has a dirty and ragged scarf on her bony shoulders. She grabs a slice of melon and tries to tempt me, puts it back on the table, licks her fingertips and starts picking another piece. Opposite the fruit stand hangs a cinema poster: Shirley Winters smiles so sweetly. Yesterday it was Marlene Dietrich who seemed bored.

At the mouth of the street rises a jumble of arches - the Colosseum. The terrifying, overwhelming mass of stone rises majestically toward the sky. The clouds are black and the colossus seems to lean against them with all the weight of its ominous severity, its gloomy grandeur, with all the agony it has witnessed over the centuries. The feeling that puzzles and takes possession of me is in itself a mystery. The incomprehensible mystery of time. And a sense of the dishonor, insignificance and eternal glory of man.

In Rome one loses the sense of permanence. One encounters the past as an irresistible but at the same time indefinable atmosphere. It is

impossible to experience the past. Nor can one live in the present. One gets lost. One cannot concentrate.

In the Colosseum, some workmen are tearing up a board floor in the arena. A mystery play has recently been performed there. Pomp and show as usual. And the fear... The workers have already unearthed some of the heretics from under the plank floors - they are dark and damp even in sunlight. I think of the lions and the Christians. And somewhere beyond the rows of proud arches a car horn grunts. At the entrance sits a man selling Coca Cola.

In the evening I come back and manage to sneak in and stand in the circle of thick shadows in the deadly silence. Everything is dead... not a life... But a presence... Call it time or mood or the long aftermath of life and death - but I feel it to the roots of my hair. I hurry away.

And another time: Via di Porta San Sebastiano, a long driveway lined with pine trees, full of the presence of times gone by, intense, almost tangible. A narrow road turns off to the left - Via Appia delle Sirene. On both sides, thick walls rise, through inhospitable portals one catches a glimpse of fading parks and majestic villas. Not a sound, not a movement. Only a sense of condensed mystery, sharpened by evil forebodings. It is the same feeling
that grips one in the Orient, in China. The impenetrable unknown swept in silence, waiting...

And then a low portico, shrouded in unbridled greenery. The inscription reads: "ISASSI DOVE FUR CHIUSE LE MEMBRA DI TA CHE NON SARANNO SEMA FAMA SE L'UNIVERSO PRIA NON I DISOL VE." Tomb of the Scipios.

I walk on. I feel neither fatigue nor hunger, no matter how far I have walked...

The sky darkens, an ominous hissing rips through the air. And then the storm breaks loose. I seek shelter in the beautiful, winding portal of a pretentious Baroque building. There is already a shrunken little man with a very black umbrella. He stands bravely at the front of the portal and watches the silvery downpour. The lightning flashes and he does not back down. But a moment later he has rushed in and hidden at the

far end of the portal. He is "safe" when the thunder shakes the house. It was the roar of the thunder and not the lightning that he was so panicked about.

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Since I happen to be a foreigner, I have to apply for a residence permit. The police station is surrounded by a chain of guards. An extremely presentable gendarme is stationed at the entrance. I enter a large stairwell. The police constable at the turnstile looks at my passport and points to the other door. There I am shown into a spacious and well-furnished room with beautiful etchings on the walls. Wide windows with heavy curtains give the room style. On one long wall is a large table covered with green cloth. Four police officers in impeccable gray uniforms, strict black scarves, stiff starched collars. One is particularly dashing; wavy hair, small mustaches, well-groomed hands with long almond-shaped nails and a massive gold signet ring on his middle finger... He gestures for me to take a seat opposite him. "American..." He examines my passport carefully. Then he raises his eyebrows and mutters something in Italian, blurred and staccato. "I don't understand," I reply. "You certainly do, of course," the boatman replies sardonically. "You do," he repeats almost threateningly. I wait with anticipation for what is to come. The police officer drums his fingertips on the tabletop. "Your mother's maiden name!" The question never ceases to irritate me. I can't understand for the life of me what the point of it is. They want to form an opinion about one's origins and environment, stick labels on people and put them in compartments... Bah! Names are disgusting. And they are devoid of all meaning - especially in our day and age when millions of people have become stateless. "Your mother's maiden name," he repeats. And then adds: "Do you speak German?" "Not very good," I blurt out, blushing. "And you've come all this way just to see Italy?" he says incredulously. I don't look like an ordinary

American tourist. "Yes," is my answer. "And you like Italy?" he grins defiantly. "Yes, very much." "E la bella Roma?" "Yes, of course." Where does he really want to go? "You don't have anything like Rome in New York... do you?" I answer calmly and politely: "No, nothing like Rome." The police officer is pleased and scribbles something on a form. Behind the desk hangs a beautiful etching depicting a young horseman spearing a hideous, writhing dragon. The text underneath reads self-consciously: "SAN MICHELE ARCANGELO, PATRONE DELLA POLIZIA." The police officer hands me the papers and grins slyly. "Molto grazia, signore." The black eyes are cynical. "Danke schön," he replies, gesturing towards the door.

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At the stately entrance to the Dominican convent on Via Liguria, I meet a beautiful old woman dressed in black. She is slender and very dirty and has lots of silver-white hair. As I walk past her, she nudges me with a sharp elbow - and extends her hand. I stop, astonished - there are not many beggars on the streets of Rome because begging is forbidden. The old woman takes my astonishment for refusal and her dark eyes flash with anger in their deep sockets. Embarrassed, I step back, fumble in my pockets but find no change, only a banknote. I press it into the beggar's wrinkled hand. She glances at it and is astonished. Her hand closes like a claw. Suddenly she reaches out with her arm and hits me in the chest with her clenched fist. Then she turns on her heel and leaves.

A cool and windless tone. A thin crescent moon. Rome relaxes. The entire population is outdoors. People are wandering around the streets, in parks and squares. There is no festive atmosphere, no expectant excitement. The whole thing is reminiscent of an outing in the countryside with small children and cats and dogs. The slightly older children have their toys with them - balls and cunnilingus. The parents are united in adoration of their bambini. They help the kids to their feet as

simply and innocently as possible, unbutton their trousers and let them squat in the gutter. No one cares, even if it happens right in front of a café or a riscorante. The families and the loving couples who flock to the monumental stairs and the marble borders of the fountains are all very natural and uncontrived. There is no overt courtship here, no suggestive French glances, but neither is there any hypocrisy. In Rome, the Italians seem to me to be themselves and unusually healthy. They are neither neurotic nor perverse, as people can easily become in modern cities. And they have a warm sensuality. It is sincere and uninhibited because they accept the natural consequences of sexuality - they reach their destiny in procreation. Their "raison d'être" is to have children. This is the secret of their sensual harmony and supple beauty.

But this is also a minus. The Italians should have taken a stand on the population problem long ago. They allow themselves to be ruled by their instincts and are becoming severely handicapped in a world where science and technology rule. When it comes to catching up with other nations in terms of planned activity, the Italians prove weak and ineffective.

Yet they have an original sense of life that is at once primitive and refined. And it is - as so many Italian films have artistically proven - not just sensuality or sexuality. It is a brew that descent and climate and language, hardship and splendor and faith in God have credenced over millennia.

Only the Romans know Rome. And how proud they can be of their city. Pride is their heritage; they are not ashamed to show it to a stranger. They are heartily bold, these people. And they show the stranger a personal interest, even if their attention is often a little financially conditioned, to begin with. They believe that every "stranger" is wealthy. With their primitive, one-sided logic, they imagine that the foreigner is trying to deceive them by playing poor. So they try to deceive him first. Ah~ they know... Their childish cunning is comical - and rather tragic. There is no malice in the Italians' calculations; they cheat in naive self-defense. They are used to being deceived. Society throws them a few meager crumbs, rather like birdseed... And they peck and pick,

quickly but not always with equal accuracy.

When the stranger admires their bella citta, they quickly forget their greed for gain. They go to great lengths to help him - and they do it with a happy heart. Their helpfulness is touching. A middle-aged couple who are about to take the bus linger to answer my questions about the obelisk. "Archeologia, historia, arte ..." The friendly husband who looks like a scholar could go on for as long as he wants. The signora tugs at his sleeve, she doesn't want to miss another bus. But he would so dearly like to talk a little more about history and art...

A park near Piazza Vittorio; palm trees, fountains, flowers, the obligatory ruins - and cats. Whole hordes of cats among gladiolus and broken marble columns. Old and young, miserably ugly, shiny fat, healthy and sick, all colors and temperaments... They play with the children or doze or sit hunched over to themselves. It's a cat sanctuary, a heaven for abandoned and stray kitties. An animal welfare society feeds them. A shabby little woman serves as a housekeeper.

When I enter the park, one of the cats has just died. She grabs her dead pensioner by the tail and carries him away. The others blink sleepily as their companion is carried past - each lost in the solitude of his own thoughts. They fight sometimes, but not often, and when they do fight, it's not about food.

Now an interlude occurs. A hollow-cheeked, hungry-looking man appears on the edge of the park carrying a sack. He's drifting around, waiting for something... The keeper is out of sight. The cats instinctively become anxious and hide among the flowers. But the man is quick in his turns - in a moment he's caught one, two, three, four cats. Spitting and scratching, they're stowed away in the sack. He's already turned around and sneaking his way when the woman comes running. She rushes at him furiously. He shoves her away, she chases him screaming. People begin to gather around them. A police constable arrives on the scene. ~More screams and admonitions and protests... and two cats fall violently kicking out of the sack. The woman resumes the fight for the other two. But now the policeman just shrugs his shoulders. And the cat thief with his troubled sack is allowed to go his way unmolested.

The woman returns with a kind and docile gatto in each hand. "Beast," she growls, "such a vomit ..."

While I witness the performance and make notes in my notebook, people flock around me and peek over my shoulder. What am I writing? And why? They are friendly, curious people who ask about everything. Where am I from? Do I like Rome (They say Rome but they mean Italy. To them it's the same thing.) Have I visited this or that place? Well, not yet. But I must do it - it is extraordinarily beautiful down there, the place is very famous. You should not neglect this or that. I promise them to visit all these places - and my despair becomes greater if possible. My walks in Rome have made me realize how infinitely little I have seen. I bring up the cats. Isn't it good that they have such a beautiful sanctuary? Are there similar parks in other countries - in America perhaps? Really not? They are inquisitive but oh so friendly. And one of the bystanders forgets where he is and suddenly begins to sing the praises of Naples. "Piu cordiale - even friendlier than Rome. And Florence ... " That's how he finds his way home again: If I wish to return to Rome one day, I need only throw a coin into a certain fountain (Trevi?). "Una moneta per returnare a Roma." I am captivated. Rome is great and mighty and very Italian. It's as if they were saying: "Come back to our friendly village sometime..."

Make a wish!

I wish I could stay here.

On a street near the main train station I meet an old porter pushing a cart full of luggage. Next to him on the sidewalk is a well-dressed blonde lady. Suddenly the portiniano stops and dives into a dark gate without a word of explanation. Above the gate hangs a sign with the word BIRRA. The owner of the Kappsäckernas can do nothing but wait. So she waits. In a moment the porter appears in the door of the beer house and continues his walk as if nothing had happened. "Was the birra good?" asks the lady. He nods. "Yes, sir. Very refreshing on a hot day." He is convinced that the strangers didn't mind his slight deviation from the path of duty. And the lady has a sense of humor and keeps a good face. Nothing can be more agreeable than to be regarded as an ordinary person.

People say that the old and the new have entered into a marriage in Rome. That may be said, but they do not love each other. Sometimes it seems to me as if the past were mocking the present in a whisper. The distant pagan past is a whole. Every fragment of wall illustrates its purposeful univocity, the union of knowledge and purpose.

Between this past and what we call modernity, only the pretentious bridge of the Renaissance floats.

And the modern? It is a conglomerate. Mismatched parts. Cogs. Levers. Nuts and bolts... Time and matter have not been coordinated into life. Is it not apt to confuse the Romans? Perhaps not. But it does not make them happier either. Beneath the pride and platitudes they feel insecure. Purposefulness and originality are lacking. What is modern - technology - was not created by the Italians. It reached Italy as a finished product. And too late. The industrial revolution bypassed Italy and took a detour via England and the United States. In the past, Italy held a leading position in trade and science and art. Then it fell behind. And the country is still behind when it comes to science or trade.

The machine has finally made its way to Italy, but not the whole machine, just a thing here and another there. Some very ingenious gimmicks. And a couple of larger sections. But not all. And not made in Italy. The people want the whole machine. But who will assemble it? Wait, wait ... In the meantime, you have to make do with a few loose pieces that can be fun to play with. Young office workers in factories or bookkeepers or salesmen whizz around the country on streamlined scooters. A girl neatly served on a beanbag increases the pleasure considerably. Cheap, fast and sporty means of transport, say the signors. I wonder if it is not more than that. The modern Italian desires what the machine age has suddenly brought within his reach - possessions, and with them personal power. He finds himself in tempted in the proximity to unlimited possibilities. And he becomes impatient because materialism is justified only by tangible results, the satisfaction of the ego. But even if the modern Italian has the mojo, he does not have the combined power of machinery at his disposal, he is not allowed to enjoy all the satisfaction that technology can give. And because he is tormented by

an inferiority complex, he props himself up with mechanical toys.

In a café where the floor is a rough cement slab and the tables seem to be made of old sugar boxes, a complicated coffee maker stands on the bar. Mysterious and impressive and a little ridiculous. Something like Alec Guinness's chemical apparatus in "The Man in the White Suit". Ah, ma - ecco! The latest new thing, the symbol of progress and personal success. And why not? On the wall behind the bar, a gentle Baroque Madonna smiles her comforting smile.

The future of Italy is not made any brighter by mechanical toys. But the present is so much more pleasant. All people are interested in mechanics. A few realize what it means to "get ahead", what ownership means. The rest wait and hope. They believe in miracles. Perhaps a miracle will in due course allow them to benefit from technology? In Italy, miracles have even managed to influence the gears.

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A week passes. Two weeks. And then the bubble bursts. I still love sitting among the ruins. I still like the Romans. But wherever I go I sense how soluble everything is. Interesting indeed, . often overwhelming. But without vitality. Dormant. "Rome is great and strong and full of self-confidence", claims an American magazine. Conceited is probably the right word, filled with its own strangeness. The Italian nation looks to Rome for advice and guidance. And what does Rome do? Rome abuses its past to keep its people in awe, its present to ward off trouble, and its future to arouse false hopes.

Rome cannot keep up the mask if one has seen more of Italy. The pleasurable experiences fade and shrink before the consciousness that the majority of the Italian people are deprived of all greatness and all possibilities. The beauty values of Rome, Naples, Florence, Venice, and Milan arouse the pride of the masses, but they do not help them. The foreigner sees excellent universities and educational institutions, but

how many Italians can afford to study? He admires hypermodern apartment buildings, but who are the people who live in them? On the outskirts of Rome lie slums where tens of thousands of people live huddled together in mounds of earth and ruins and squalor. They live on bread crumbs and rotten fruit. The children do not go to school because they lack shoes.

"They don't mind living like that... they've never had it better... basically they're really happy... you often hear them singing..." I quote pious and socially conservative people who rush to the rescue whenever it comes to the victims of floods or earthquakes or other sensational disasters.

But in Italy, suffering is rarely sensational. It's so common, and the effects are very slow - people seem to passively accept it. The conditions arouse surprisingly little resistance. There are strikes and brawls and fights in parliament - but no open revolt.

For beneath the discontent lurks a sense of insecurity that has its origin in an ancient subservience. And the cause of this subservience is Rome.

My Italian trip has turned out to be a political experience. And since politics in this country can never be completely separated from religion, I must visit the Vatican. It is strikingly reminiscent of a colored postcard, more than that, of a three-dimensional postcard with sound effects. The dimensions are mostly vertical, everything swings upwards, up towards the theatrical dome with its clouds of orthodox ecstasy.

For a moment I am back in Ravenna and the mausoleum of San Vitale. An unassuming piece of Byzantine brick wall, a bronze door - and wonder of all wonders - the mosaic interior! A low vault of gold and blue glittering in the glimmer of light that filters in through narrow cracks covered with pale rose-red alabaster. Time ceased to exist - nothing existed but the sublime beauty of the mosaics, perfect and unchanging as it had been for fifteen centuries. A small group of visitors in the semi-darkness, a man explaining in Italian how the window slits had been adapted so that the light from below would bring the colors

to life. He was entranced and awed, and the visitors whispered eager questions. Nothing broke the spell in this closed little room of timeless and mysterious light...

And now I stand in St. Peter's Basilica, listening to the sharp clicks of a diving shoe. A sullen girl in a bright red dress balances on high heels over the sea of floor. She approaches with swaying hips, marking the beat with a lavender parasol.

The faces, the voices - a group of visitors in front of the high altar, another group around an ornate pulpit staircase, a third with uplifted faces in front of one of the depressingly close altarpieces. "And here you see..." In how many different languages? Among the gloomy side chapels, a window of amber-colored glass shines, sculptures with old darkened gilding - exquisite. I walk past the altar and turn left and stop in amazement... A skull snarls at me over a massive closed door. The skeleton is also there. It lies stretched out on the cornice in a pleated cloak. One hand holds an hourglass, the other points to the ebbing grains of sand. The skeleton is diabolically lifelike - and gilded! Take heed while there is time! Obedience!

And love? Shouldn't love be the chief subject of their sermons? The dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit, hovers everywhere - high under the ceiling, on the columns, on the altarpieces - yes, even on the floor... The dove... so incongruous with everything else, yet part of a cleverly contrived theatrical whole.

In the treasury, tourists gasp in delight at priceless misappropriated riches. In the marble labyrinths beneath the cathedral, priests crawl from one sarcophagus to another, stare at the reliefs, nod and whisper: "Who was that?" ... Behind a frosted glass door, a cardinal receives a breathless messenger. Is this a scene from a historical play?

In the portal is a souvenir shop. Two elegant ladies pick among the goods ... a pale Madonna, a silver crucifix, a silk handkerchief with edifying images...

"I've been waiting a whole week," says one of the ladies. "Maybe the Holy Father tomorrow... a public audience...!"

A young German with an expensive camera wants to buy an album.

An awkward red-haired Irish priest stuffs his pockets full of postcards - the Virgin Mary with the baby Jesus, Christ on the cross, the kneeling Pope...

Here are statuettes and medals, cups and saucers, rosaries and toilet bags - in bronze, ebony, sandalwood and plastic... Paint the picture... like this. Punch out the name... like that. And wrap it in paper. Pav the road that leads to heaven with the dove's wing feathers!

Piazza San Pietro shimmers like a rainbow. In the colonnade, young artists try to capture fragments of beauty with paint or charcoal. But they fail to depict the patina of the walls and columns, the texture that only time can give. In the wide semicircle of aged stone, women sit knitting, children play hide-and-seek, a man lies stretched out and dozes in the narrow shadow. On the other side of the piazza, on the huge staircase, the stream of Hindus, Chinese, negroes and Japanese, Westerners and Orientals, bustle about each other, a dazzling, confusing vortex glimpsed through the cascades of the fountain.

Some workmen are in the process of building a kind of stage or stage in front of the facade. And around the enormous, angry dome a flock of pigeons flutters. I imagine that this is exactly what the Italians resemble - a flock of pigeons flying round and round in a circle around a highly efficient radio transmitter. For here is the radio station, from here emanates the spiritual power that holds them bound...

If you consider the matter more closely, you are not struck by the great amount of skepticism that exists in Italy - on the contrary, you are amazed by the opposite. The Catholic faith of the Italians is so unconditional that it forms one of the foundations of their character. The vigilance, distrust and fear have arisen from their misguided religiosity - this is the tragic side of the Italian people's soul. For the true nature of the Italians is healthy and warmly human. Suspicion is only an acquired quality, the result of long-standing disappointment. The reason for this profound disappointment must be sought in their history. And the history of Italy is inseparably linked with that of the Church.

Disappointment and disappointment... One can define it as centuries of absolutism under the domination of the papacy. In Italy, since

the dawn of time, the man of the people has had to endure privations - he has never been his own master. He has not been allowed to realize himself in work - only to slave for his livelihood. In his despair, he sought refuge with the masters, only to be sent on to the priests who in turn unloaded his worries on God. Beyond God there was everything or nothing, depending on the strength of his faith. But around the priests and the masters lay the dark night, the moral twilight. And in this darkness the man of the people groped back and forth between master and priest.

How could his faith be transformed into trust? He lacked all reason to have confidence, just as he was incapable of reaching liberalism. Whatever happened, he always found himself deceived, alone, disarmed and bound by ancient prejudices.

Not even the Risorgimento fundamentally disturbed these concepts. The freedom movement was honestly determined to reform them. The Risorgimento really wanted to carry out a democratic reconstruction of society. But what happened? Mazzini, Garibaldi and the Italian people were outmaneuvered by men like Cavour and King Vittorio Emmanuele. The changes turned out to be anything but democratic; they consisted in a skillful reshuffling of an archaic social system.

The Catholic Church had suffered a loss of prestige, but after the liberation it still retained its grip on the Italian people's soul. Soon the Church began to regain its positions in society. And when a new danger threatened, the Church was already capable of making the choice that best served its interests. It publicly condemned fascism but was a co-player in the reckless gamble that Mussolini initiated.

Mussolini... His name still has a magical luster. Photographs of him and his family appear on the front pages of magazines. And people say: "He did what he could for Italy. Now nothing is being done for us anymore..." That was also Lando's argument - "Per l'Italia". Under fascism, the Italians found an outlet for their nationalist feelings - however negative they may have been. Mussolini created a new generation of zealous, even enthusiastic young fascists. He raised the standard of living and gave color and brilliance to everyday Italian life. That this

happened at the expense of freedom? To this many Italians reply: "We had no freedom of speech then, and we don't have it now either. The police are constantly on guard. How can one enjoy civil rights when one third of the population is fascist and another third communist?"

One at the expense of the other. Respect... pride, freedom from want. Different people are willing to pay different prices for these kinds of goods. Who can judge the price without first knowing the people?

In a country like Italy where the hardships are almost unbearable, one willingly gives up all sorts of little things and goodies in order at least to avoid starving. And as for freedom, it has never been very real for these people who have lived for centuries in renunciation and submission. How high would the price, that is, the partial loss of freedom, seem to them if they received material advantages in exchange? Why should not those who have eaten of the bitter fruits of fascism one day be willing to taste communism? What determines the attitude of many Italians to the question of price is not what they can lose but what they can earn from the spoils.

My sage in Brescia claimed that Italians in general are not politically conscious. But how could they be conscious when they have never had a real opportunity to determine how their own destinies would turn out? It can be said that Italians are not well-informed and politically mature. But they have a primitive receptivity and a deep sense of life. That is already the beginning of awareness.

There are people who know nothing. And there are people who know the wrong things. It strikes me that those who know nothing after all constitute the better breeding ground for human virtues. When people do not have to get used to something, they acquire the right lessons more quickly. The lack of knowledge does not exclude the solid logic that leads people to .true life values. The only thing that complicates the matter is the feelings of the Italians. The Italians want to - serve wholeheartedly. That is what made them such good Catholics. Or fascists. And it can still transform them into good socialists. Italy is being torn apart by an intense ideological struggle. The Vatican has openly taken sides. The Pope has attacked the people's lack of willpower and spiritual

drowsiness. He has said that millions of people look to the Church as their only strong defense. The Catholic Church suffered a setback in the 1953 elections, but it has often taken one step back in order to take two steps forward later. It is prepared to compromise if the compromise means that it can survive. And if survival should lead to it having to make certain practical agreements with socialism ... well, why not. The Church knows what it stands for, and it knows its Italian people. Or does it not? Surprising things are happening - in Northern Italy many priests - and even a certain very important cardinal - have called on the workers to take measures that have the character of a genuine liberal popular movement. A stratagem? Perhaps. But if the Church were divided, if for the first time it had misjudged the reaction of the people - then this "Christian revolt" would be the beginning of something irreversible, the consequences of which cannot yet be foreseen.

I remembered what the Communist had said - "We are not fighting against religion as such..." The words had a strange ring to them. And that must have been very embarrassing for the Communists. They dare not fight religion because it is so deeply rooted in the Italian consciousness. Therefore the Communists and the Socialists are forced to compromise. All parties must do that. And in the meantime the people wait.

The whole thing is a true map of disappointed hopes - a mess of doubt and disillusionment, confusion and desperation - and so it has been in Italy since the beginning of time. Beneath it all lies like a mountain a conception of life, the Catholic faith.

One cannot help but ask oneself: Can there ever be any real progress as long as the Italians try to build on Catholic foundations? All these COMBINAZIONI, the political and ideological concoctions, are attempts to reform and revive an institution that is rotten to the core. Catholicism forms the backbone of an economic and social construction that is unscrupulous, selfish and narrow-minded. Catholicism preaches Death but stubbornly refuses to die. It tries to give people confidence but is no longer able to inspire people. Catholicism is an idea that is not suited to our times, because it literally does not work. It is non-vital.

No COMBINAZIONE can save the situation. A distorted outlook on life cannot give people courage and strength. All the old rubbish must be swept away before reconstruction can begin. The old must die so that the new can live.

And this is the sore point. The old is an integral part of the Italian's personality. Something inside him must die before he can become a whole and living person again. That is where it clicks; this is the source of his indecision. Circumstances force upon him a decision for which he is not ready, neither morally nor historically. He wants the old. And he wants the new. He wants his Pope. And he desires socialism. But he fails to make the calculation right. Faced with the compulsion to abandon one way of life and integrate into another, he feels bound, confused and afraid...

I am sitting in the sunshine in the piazza. The colonnade behind me casts deep shadows. People are working or resting. And above my head the flock of pigeons continues to flutter around the dome...

Such is Italy. Betrayal and deceit have been the mortar of history and injustice has triumphed. Here a religious obsession has been allowed to encircle and shrink a people, isolating them from the outside world, delaying their progress and depriving them of enlightenment and joy. Christian democrats, neo-fascists, monarchists, communists, socialists - headlessly flapping around and around in an eternal cycle, shackled by something in their conscience...

But time passes. The terrible, intangible power that radiates from the dome of St. Peter's Basilica weakens more and more.

And if it one day ceases to exist, will the pigeons then swing out into the sea of air, and fly high and far - or just settle down completely calmly?

Public education... science... No, the solution must be sought elsewhere. Not even intelligence can help. They must find the answer in their own hearts.

ITALIAN JOURNEY

James Krenov is an American of Russian descent who has been living in Sweden for several years. He works in a factory most of the year and spends the rest of his time hiking and cycling in Europe. He writes. Has recounted his travel experiences in DN's Sunday edition and written about his adventures in the Swedish mountains in the annual publication of the Swedish Tourist Association.

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